

A LOYAL YOUNG
REBEL
D.H. Parry

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A LOYAL YOUNG REBEL

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“‘I will help you,’ said a familiar voice, as Ned ‘Neitherside’ dismounted.” (See page 203.)

A Loyal Young Rebel

By

D. H. Parry

*Author of "The Scarlet Scouts," "The Little Regiment,"
etc.*

With Four Illustrations in
Colour and Black-and-White
by C. E. BROCK, R.I.



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CHAPTER I

HOME—AND AFTER

HOME is a wonderful place, especially when you haven't seen it for three months, and Dick Ormerod was leaning through one window of the yellow postchaise while his brother Humphrey craned his neck out of the other. Both lads gave a glad shout as they got their first glimpse of the village round the bend in the leafy lane.

“Here it is at last, Dick! There's the church tower, and the pond with the ducks on it!”

“And yonder's The Load of Hay, Humph. But look! If here isn't Sam Brewster in the stocks again! Why, the rogue was there when we went by to school last time!”

The pair roared with laughter, and the village poacher waved a ragged sleeve as he recognized

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them, crying : “ Welcome, Maister Humphrey, and you, Maister Richard ! Mebbe you think they hav’na takken me out since ? ” And a grin spread over his brown visage.

“ Never mind, Sam ! ” shouted Dick Ormerod, as the chaise passed within a yard of Brewster’s feet, projecting helplessly through the circular holes in the wooden bar that imprisoned them. “ We’ll ask uncle to let you free.”

“ And I doubt he won’t, seeing ’twas t’major clapped me into t’stocks to begin with. Eh, but they’re a pair of bright lads and shootin’ up like beanstalks ! ” murmured the reprobate, following the departing vehicle with a kindling eye and a dubious shake of his own unkempt locks.

Past the triangular patch of grass round which the red cottages clustered, by the snug inn at the far end with its trim bowling green and swaying signboard, the yellow chaise vanished once more among the high hedgerows, soon to turn into a park gate along an avenue of trees that led to the hall.

“ Home again, Dick ! ” laughed brown-haired Humphrey. “ And this time it’s for good ! ”

“ Perhaps ! ”

“ Why, what on earth do you mean by

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that?" queried his twin brother, looking across the chaise at him.

But Dick Ormerod stared out of the window for the fraction of a moment, a thoughtful smile on his dark, handsome face.

"Have you forgotten what we expect to find waiting for us?" he replied at length, smiling oddly.

"Oh, the King's Commissions?" said Humphrey. "Not likely to forget those, Dick, since we have dreamed of nothing else. But you were not thinking of them when you spoke. What is the matter with you? You have been different somehow of late—ever since you took those long walks with that smooth-tongued usher, Wakefield. I hate the fellow!"

"There is nothing the matter with me, Humphrey, and why should you hate Mr. Wakefield? He has more learning in his little finger than old Booth in the whole of his fat carcass."

"That may be," said Humphrey stolidly. "But I never could stand his oily smile and his soapy way with all the boys that had money."

"You do him an injustice, Humphrey. I learned a great deal from Mr. Wakefield," and the subject dropped between them as the chaise

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stopped with a jerk, and they sprang out to greet the little group at the door, their mother and the girls, and Uncle Egerton, whose scarlet regiments and wooden leg made him look like a hero—which, as a matter of fact, he was.

Uncle Egerton, their father's only brother, had lost his limb in the famous battle of Dettingen, two years before, fighting very gallantly in the King's Own Regiment of Dragoons, and he was seldom seen now save in the silver-laced coat with the skirts turned back with blue that he had worn there.

More fortunate than Colonel Ormerod, who had fallen mortally wounded in the last charge of Ligonier's Horse in the same fight—which accounted for the half-mourning their mother was still wearing—the major had made his home with them at the Hall, where everybody loved him, in spite of his blustering dragoon manners and the military discipline he enforced.

“Fear God and honour the King!” was his motto, which he was never tired of impressing on his nephews as the whole gospel of an Englishman.

“Why, bless my soul! the rascals have grown another six inches since they were last here,

Mary ! ” he cried, when the new arrivals disengaged themselves at length from their mother’s embrace. “ Dick, you dog, you have it in height, but Humphrey’s shoulders are broader. And only seventeen, too ! Zounds, what a strapping brace of dragoons you’ll make, the pair of ye ! ”

And having slapped them both on the back very hard, and crushed their fingers in his iron grip, the warrior took snuff as if for a wager, still eyeing them admiringly the while.

“ Oh, hush, Egerton ! ” said the widow, with a sad smile, as their three sisters captured the lads in their turn. “ Let me have my boys a little longer before you talk of soldiering for them. Besides, their commissions are not here yet, and as the King is still in Hanover, I pray they may not arrive for many months to come.”

Humphrey’s face fell.

“ What, not here yet ? ” he exclaimed dolefully, but his brother Dick said nothing, and Mrs. Ormerod slipped her hand lovingly through his arm ; for did not Richard take after her with his dark complexion and long black lashes ? And his very silence at that moment seemed to strengthen the bond between them, though fortunately she was ignorant of its real cause.

But everyone being as overjoyed to see them as they themselves were to be rid of school for good and all, the happy Ormerod family surged into the house, leaving the serving men to uncord the hair trunks tied to the back of the post-chaise.

And what a home it was—that delightful old black and white timbered mansion, all gables and carved beams, and twisted chimney-stacks, which were mirrored in the deep waters of the mere. It had a gallery, too, where a ghost was supposed to walk, though no one had ever seen it, and secret hiding-places and sliding panels, and armour on the staircase.

Cheshire is full of such delightful places, with coats of arms in the diamond-paned windows, through which the sun slants, throwing the gules, and azure, and purple on to polished floors. And in addition to all these things, and many more, Ormerod Hall just then was filled with merry laughter, and the delighted barking of innumerable dogs, leaping and fawning upon Humphrey and Dick, who were promptly carried off to see a litter of setter pups in the stables behind the house.

“Well, Mary. I find the boys much im-

proved," said Uncle Egerton, depositing his snuff-box in the pocket of his long-flapped waistcoat. " You ought to be as proud of your brood as Juno is of her pups out yonder."

" And I believe I am even prouder," smiled Mrs. Ormerod. " There are no girls like mine, and as for Dick and Humphrey, I only wish their dear father had been spared to see them."

Her eyes went out through the window across the rolling park-land, where the fallow deer couched under the spreading oaks, and the major's hand was very gentle and sympathetic as he laid it on her shoulder.

" Yes, Mary, I know all you are thinking," he said. " But Fortune has not been too unkind to you after all, and this of all days is one for happiness without a cloud. See, Edward himself is smiling at us," and he pointed to the portrait of Colonel Ormerod hanging above the fireplace, in the full regimentals of Ligonier's Horse, with their black lapels and gold buttons.

Allowing for the difference in age, and the powdered Ramillies wig, it might have been Humphrey's own face that looked down from the canvas, as he followed his brother Richard into the room at the moment.

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“Uncle Egerton,” said Dick, “would you like to give us a treat to celebrate the homecoming?” The major looked at the roguish twinkle in his nephew’s dark eyes.

“Bless my soul! What do you want now? Something out of the common, I’ll be bound.”

“Only to set Sam Brewster free of the stocks in honour of the day,” laughed Dick.

“Hum! I’d clap him in gaol and keep him there altogether if I had my wish,” said Uncle Egerton, “the poaching wastrel! That man’s a rogue and a vagabond, and nothing seems to make him mend his ways.”

“But he would have made a fine dragoon, uncle, if he hadn’t lamed himself in that man-trap,” urged Dick, still twinkling as he played his trump card.

“His own fault—he shouldn’t have been where the man-trap was set, and then he wouldn’t have got into it. But you’re quite right, Dick; he *would* have made a good dragoon. I never thought of that before. You can send one of the men down to Marples, the constable, and tell him I order Brewster’s release; but next time he’s up before me, into Knutsford Gaol he goes!”

Dick ran off to the stables again, and the first person he encountered being Jim Mobberley, who had been a corporal in Uncle Egerton's regiment, he dispatched him on the errand of mercy, slipping a coin into his hand at the same time with a whispered word.

Meanwhile, Uncle Egerton having stumped away to his own room, Mrs. Ormerod and Humphrey found themselves alone.

“Humphrey,” said his mother, as he placed an affectionate arm about her waist, and she smoothing his brown hair the while, “there is a change in your brother Richard. Has all been well with him at school this time?”

“Dick has been quite well, mother,” was the guarded reply. “But I also have noticed a difference in his manner of late. Sometimes he is brimful of spirits, but at others he will be lost in thought and starts when one speaks to him.”

“He cannot be in trouble of any kind without your knowing it, can he?” But Humphrey only shook his head and looked puzzled.

“That is impossible, mither. We have rarely been out of each other's sight, except of a Saturday, when Dick and the new usher would often go off for long walks together, and 'tis from

that time that Dick has not seemed quite his old self."

"And who is the new usher, or rather, shall we say, who was he? For you will hardly see him any more."

"His name was Josiah Wakefield," replied Humphrey. "He was far cleverer than any of the other masters, even than Doctor Booth himself. He spoke French and Italian, and a great deal of Latin; but I never liked him."

If Mrs. Ormerod's heart secretly inclined to her son Richard, perhaps because in early childhood he had been the more delicate of her twin boys, she had also a great regard for Humphrey's sound common sense and a certain obstinacy of character which he had inherited from the dead colonel.

"And why did you dislike the man, Humphrey? Was it want of breeding? Was he a gentleman?"

"He might well pass as such, mother," replied the lad, "but I hated him because he was such a toady. All of us who had wealthy parents were his favourites. We never had a punishment—not that we didn't often deserve them—but he was a brute to the others. There

was one poor little chap whose mother could ill afford to send him as a boarder, and he had more floggings than the whole school put together, and always through Wakefield."

Humphrey's square jaw grew squarer, and righteous indignation blazed in his eyes as he thought of things that had happened.

"Richard is impulsive," said his mother. "He is quick to make new friendships, and possibly he found something in Mr. Wakefield that appealed to him—something you have not discovered, my dear boy. Still, I am glad that he will no longer be under his influence. You know, Humphrey, you had an elder brother once, and Richard resembles him very much in temperament. I do not want another shadow to fall over our happiness. You will hardly remember George. You were both very young when he defied his father and ran away to sea."

Humphrey Ormerod's arm tightened about her, and a surprised look came into his face.

"Why speak of it now, dear? I thought it was a forbidden topic?" he said. "Dick loves you dearly, and would die rather than cause you anguish. No, I can only just recollect poor George, riding father's grey hunter; and then

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one day his picture was taken down from the wall, and we were told never to speak of him again. But some day you will have news; he will come back."

"No, Humphrey, George is dead," said Mrs. Ormerod with a deep sigh. "And now hush. I hear Richard's voice in the hall. Not a word to him of our talk—for the present, at any rate!"

She passed up the staircase to her chamber, where she opened a locked drawer in the Queen Anne tallboy, and gazed with tear-dimmed eyes at the miniature of her firstborn, which might well have been the portrait of Richard himself, with the same long, dark lashes, and the sensitive, clear-cut nose, that made him seem more a Leigh than an Ormerod.

Only when the clatter of hoofs and the merry ring of girlish voices came from the hall door did she lock her treasure away again, and the tears with it.

Her nieces had arrived, and when those two romps, Peggy and Joan, came to Ormerod Hall they took the old house by storm and turned everything upside-down.

CHAPTER II

AT THE LOAD OF HAY

MEANWHILE Corporal Jim Mobberley, chewing a meditative straw, made his way to the village, found Marples, the constable, in his little cottage by the lych-gate of the church, and duly delivered Master Richard's message.

“ Bless my soul ! ” grumbled Marples. “ What with puttin' him in and takkin' him out, Sam Brewster's more trouble than he's worth.”

But Major Ormerod being Chairman of the Justices, his word was law, and putting on his cocked hat and laced coat to give due semblance of authority to the proceeding, old Marples, who was beadle and constable in one, took down his keys, and they walked towards the stocks.

“ If you'd been at The Load o' Hay last night, corporal, you'd have happened wi' some news,” said Marples. “ That gallows bird's been up to his tricks again.”

“ What, the highwayman ? ”

“ Yes. This time he robbed the earl’s steward of twenty guineas at the very gates of Dunham Park, and light enough to see the brown roadster with the four white feet.”

“ Tha never says ! ” cried the corporal. “ He’s a rare plucked ’un, whoever he be, and I will say this for him, he never takes but from those who can afford to lose.”

“ That’s as mebbe,” said Mr. Marples ; “ but it won’t avail him when he’s gotten rope round t’neck.”

“ You’ve got to catch him first,” grinned the ex-dragoon ; “ and I reckon that white-foot of his will lead the hue-and-cry as long a dance as an old dog fox. Well, Sam, you’re in luck again ! ” and he dropped a shilling into Brewster’s astonished palm.

The poacher looked at the coin when the beadle had unlocked the hinged bar and freed him.

“ So, Maister Richard sent me this, did he ? ” he said. “ Bless the lad ! Mebbe one day I may be able to do him a good turn. Come on, Corporal, it bain’t bad ale at The Load of Hay. We’ll go and empty a pottle together,” and they

walked across the green, Sam Brewster halting slightly with that left foot, whose ankle had been badly broken in the man-trap years before.

“ What, you loose again, Brewster ? Wonders will never cease ! ” laughed a pleasant musical voice, as they lifted the clicking latch and entered the low room with the beamed ceiling and sanded floor, and the poacher knuckled his forehead respectfully and grinned at the speaker.

“ I never was one to be laid by the heels for long at a time, Maister Nethersole. ‘Tain’t my natur’, ” he laughed.

The gentleman who had addressed him from the inner parlour, where he stood leaning against the wooden chimney-piece, wore a riding suit of dark green cloth, embroidered at the button-holes with gold thread, and a long buff waistcoat reaching almost to his black knee-boots.

His white cravat and the ruffles at his wrists were of fine Mechlin lace, and his red hair was without powder, tied in a long plaited pigtail, with a large bow at the nape of the neck and a smaller one at the other end.

His face, almost as brown as the poacher’s own, from a life in the open air, was a pleasant one when he smiled, in spite of the fact that

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his nose had been broken and was set a little to one side in consequence.

Altogether it was a striking face, and Mr. Ned Nethersole was a very popular young gentleman among the hard-riding, cock-fighting Cheshire squires. Few could put a horse so well over a stiff fence; none knew the points of a dog better than he; and though he was perhaps more at home when leading a rousing chorus in the parlour of *The Load of Hay*, or at some hunt dinner, he could also warble a ballad with great sweetness when fair fingers accompanied him upon the harpsichord.

And yet there were times when no smile played about the firm mouth, and the square chin could be grim enough, when all the laughter was banished from Ned Nethersole's eyes; and the ragged poacher in the adjoining room was the only one who knew the reason why.

“And who set you free, Brewster?” called out Nethersole's companion, lighting his long clay pipe. “Not the major, I'll be bound!”

“ ‘Twas Maister Richard put in a kind word for me, squire,” chuckled Brewster, looming for a moment in the doorway to knuckle his brow again to Squire Daracotte.

“So the boys are back?” cried the squire. “You don’t know Ormerod’s nephews, Ned, do you?”

“My acquaintance with the Ormerod family begins and ends with the major himself,” smiled Mr. Nethersole. “And that reminds me, Daracotte, I have to play him the last game of our match to-night on the bowling green here—five guineas to the one who wins the rubber.”

“If you’d forgotten it, I hadn’t. I have a wager with Warburton that you’ll win, Ned, and for mercy’s sake don’t fail me, for I am most plausibly hard up at the moment.”

There were not a few who said that “Dashing” Daracotte, with his red face and boisterous ways, would prove Mr. Nethersole’s undoing, for the pair were much together; but the young gentleman in the green riding suit was very capable of taking care of himself, as we shall find as we follow his fortunes.

“By the way, Ned, these are strange rumours about the Pretender. I heard another one this morning—that the French King intends an expedition to restore the Stuarts to the throne,” said the squire. “Is there any truth in it, think you?”

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“ I’m but a poor prophet, but ’twould be a good moment for such a venture, with the King still abroad and more than half our troops in Flanders.”

“ Zounds ! I, for one, am quite content with things as they are,” said Daracotte. “ Church and State for me, and God save King George, say I ! ”

“ And yet there are some of our neighbours who are not of your way of thinking,” said Ned Nethersole, smiling.

“ I know it ! ” cried Dashing Daracotte, bringing his fist down on the table with a thump that made the glasses jingle. “ You mean that rascal Tom Leigh, for example. Everyone knows he’s a Jacobite at heart ; plotting treason and neglecting his girls.”

“ They’re cousins of the Ormerods, surely ? ” queried Nethersole.

“ Yes, first cousins. But there was never much love lost between poor Edward Ormerod and Tom Leigh. The colonel was straight as a gun barrel —a soldier, every inch of him. As for Leigh, I’ve no patience with a man who shuts himself up in a room lined with musty old books. I’ve ridden past his house at two o’clock of a morn-

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ing and seen the candles alight in his study. Yet how often do you meet him with a good nag between his knees ? ”

“ Still, that doesn’t make him a rebel, Daracotte ; and if Tom Leigh doesn’t ride, his girls do. Few can beat them in these parts.”

“ True for you, Ned. I’ve nothing to say against either Peggy or Joan at the covert-side, and both wenches pretty as a picture ; but Tom Leigh may go hang for me ! ”

“ Which he is more than likely to do if he turns rebel again ! ” laughed Nethersole, stopping short as the door opened and a stranger entered, bowing politely to the pair.

“ Good Morrow to you, gentlemen,” said the new-comer, whose brown suit was covered with dust, and who carried a cloak-bag and walking staff in his hand. “ If you have no objection I will drink a pot and munch a crust of bread and cheese in your honourable company ; the good folk of the house sent me hither.”

“ Nay, sir, this is an inn where all are free and welcome ! ” said Dashing Daracotte. “ Provided they are prepared to toast the King’s health.”

“ Willingly, twice over ! ” laughed the

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stranger. "Loyalty is a tender plant that needs well watering these days, gentlemen. I am from the West Country myself, but the squires of Cheshire are famed for their adherence to the reigning house, as all the world knows, and I have seen a good deal of it."

"Of the world or our county?" questioned Dashing Daracotte.

"Both, sir. I have made the Grand Tour in company with a young gentleman of fortune, and for the last twelve months I have held the post of usher in the establishment of Doctor Booth at Lymm. Maybe you have heard of him?"

"Heard of him? Not only have I heard of him, but I have also felt the weight of his arm!" cried the squire. "Would I had as many guineas in my fob as I have had strokes from the old rascal's cane. Maybe you will have seen the name of Daracotte cut into the wall of the school-room?"

"I have indeed!" laughed the new-comer. "'Tis upon the right-hand lintel of the door in letters a hand's breadth long, Mr. Daracotte, and marvellous well carven. My name is Josiah Wakefield, at your service, sir."

Squire Daracotte reached his great arm forward, being hail-fellow-well-met with all and sundry, and the two men shook hands; but Mr. Edward Nethersole folded his own arms across his deep chest. Somehow he had taken a dislike to Josiah Wakefield from the moment he clapped eyes upon him. Not that he was ill-looking, being rather handsome of face than otherwise, though very swarthy; but the ready smile that showed his white teeth had failed to make a favourable impression upon the observer.

The usher was a young man of thirty or thereabouts, which happened to be Nethersole's own age, and he had a very soft voice and a pair of eyes that were never still a moment.

Almost before he had made his bow on entering the apartment, those eyes had taken in every detail of the two occupants; to say nothing of the room itself, with its foxes' masks and brushes nailed upon the wall; the ladder-backed chairs with their rush bottoms; the stuffed gamecock in a glass case in one corner, and the scrupulous cleanliness of it all.

Yet scarcely once did the eyes rest on those of the man he was speaking to, seeming rather to focus on the tip of one of Daracotte's

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ears, although he continued to smile all the time.

“What? Not going yet, Ned?” cried the squire, as young Nethersole smacked his boot with his riding switch.

“Yes, I have business, Daracotte. I shall be here again at seven o’clock this evening, never fear, and if you lose your wager it will not be my fault. Good morning to you, sir!” And with a brief nod he passed the usher and went out.

“Your friend is a very handsome gentleman, who would look well in the King’s red coat,” said Wakefield when he had gone. “To say truth, I did not catch his name.”

“That is Ned Nethersole, as fine a fellow as ever set foot in a stirrup-iron.”

“And I would venture the opinion that there are no finer men living than your Cheshire gentry, sir. Am I not right?”

“You are right and wrong in this case,” laughed the squire. “Wrong when you credit Nethersole to the county. He is Yorkshire bred, and has been among us but a couple of years at most—a man of money, sir, who keeps his hunters on a small farm a league from this. But have

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you no news, Mr. Wakefield ? Have you heard aught of this scoundrelly Pretender whose name is in everyone's mouth ? ”

“ None that I can positively swear to,” replied the usher gravely ; “ but as I walked through Budworth village I heard it said that he was already landed in Scotland.”

“ Gad’s life ! ” shouted Dashing Daracotte. “ Then I hope it is true ! ”

“ What, sir ? From your words just now—” began Josiah Wakefield.

“ Oh, you misunderstand me. I mean it not in that sense ; but ’tis my intention to raise a troop of Light Horse to help oppose him, should the beggar set foot on British soil. Our fox-hunters would give him a rare chase, I promise you ! ”

The sudden sparkle that had shone in his listener’s eyes for an instant faded away.

“ Bravo, sir ! ” he cried, raising his glass quickly. “ Let us drink to his speedy overthrow, should he be foolish enough to come among us ! ”

In the adjoining room the poacher’s shilling melted quickly away, and as he and the corporal rose to go the latter winked at him

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and jerked his thumb in the direction of the parlour.

“ The squire has found someone after his own heart,” said Mobberley when they were outside. “ He be a rare gentleman for the bottle.”

“ That he be ! ” nodded Sam Brewster ; “ and when his tongue is loosened he be like a bottle himsen with t’ cork drawn, for everything comes tumbling out. I dunno where t’other gentleman comes from, but he’s pumping t’squire to a pretty tune and learning all he wants to know.”

They parted, and as the poacher took his way to the lonely little cottage at the crossroads where he lived by himself, his shrewd face was unusually thoughtful as he recalled the loud conversation which he had overheard at the inn.

“ Wunner what that strange gentleman wants to find out? ” he muttered to himself. “ He’s got the names of all the gentry off pat, and Squire Daracotte answered every question he asked him, like a fule. Be he one of they Bow Street Runners we’ve ‘eerd tell on from London town? Is it the highwayman he’s arter? ”

But instead of the idea dispelling the poacher’s frown it seemed to increase it, and

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scowling blackly, he snicked the latch of his door and closed it behind him with a bang.

The first thing he did was to move some litter of old sacks and boxes and lift up a floor-board in the corner of the back room, to satisfy himself that his precious old flintlock muzzle-loading gun was still in its hiding-place. Then he dragged the boxes over the spot again, rubbed his stubbly chin thoughtfully for a moment, and went out into the sunshine once more.

In the distance the spire of Rosthern rose against a sky of cloudless blue beyond the corn-fields. Nearer at hand, but in the opposite direction, across the lazy little Bollin river, was the ridge of Bowden Downs, scarcely built upon in those days except for the square church tower and a handful of dwellings, the hill sloping westward to the wooded demesne of the Earls of Stamford and Warrington—a pleasant prospect of open pastoral country, through which the road from Manchester wound up hill and down dale.

But Sam Brewster was not thinking of the landscape as he set out for Withy Lane Farm, where his respectable old mother kept house for Mr. Edward Nethersole.

He had not gone far when hoof-beats on the

road behind him made him turn his head quickly, and recognizing the four riders who came cantering towards him, his frown melted away and he made ready to doff his hat to the little party.

Humphrey and his brother laughed heartily at sight of him, and Dick shook his riding whip, crying: “Fie, fie, Sam!” with mock severity; but Tom Leigh’s two daughters looked straight between their horses’ ears, having been brought up to regard rogues and vagabonds as unnecessary nuisances on life’s highway, and not to be noticed by those of gentle birth.

“Dick, I’m positively ashamed of you! The idea of speaking to that man!” said Cousin Peggy with a toss of her glorious black hair, which the wind bade fair to blow out of its ribbon. “But of course you don’t know, sir, that he was committed to the stocks only yesterday by a full bench of magistrates as an incorrigible? I cannot tell how he comes to be free again.”

Dick and Humphrey looked at each other and shook with merriment.

“ ‘Tis all very well for you to laugh, sirrah!” cried his pretty cousin, hitting him playfully across the bridle hand with her switch. “A pair

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of nice magistrates you will make when your time comes! But there, long before that happens the Chevalier will be on the throne of his ancestors, and rascals like Brewster will be sent to the plantations!"

"Still got your head stuffed with Jacobite nonsense, Peggy?" laughed Humphrey, coming to his brother's rescue.

"Nonsense, indeed!" cried both girls in a breath. "If you only knew what we know!" —but Joan, who was more discreet than her sister, said: "Hush, Peggy! We must not betray State secrets, and they will learn for themselves all in good time."

Humphrey curled his lip with an indulgent smile of fine superiority, but Dick's horse gave him trouble at the moment, and only Peggy's sharp eyes saw that his face had turned very white for an instant, and then grown scarlet.

They found Uncle Tom Leigh in his library, as usual, and if, as Dashing Daracotte had hinted, their own father and the bookworm had not been on the best of terms, his welcome to the boys was at any rate very cordial.

"Lads, I'm right glad to see you," said Uncle Tom. "Come as often as you like, and

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the oftener the better, for since we keep but little company these times, the girls have few friends, and I fear me are sometimes lonely."

The family at the Manor House made no secret of their Jacobite leanings. In fact, it was well known that Tom Leigh had drawn his sword for the Old Pretender, only escaping the fate of my Lord Derwentwater and other unfortunate rebels by the skin of his teeth after the disastrous rising of 1715.

A man of very courtly presence, who had acquired a taste for books during the years of his exile, his hard-riding neighbours, of whom Dashing Daracotte was a type, looked askance at the recluse, and shrugged their shoulders when his name was mentioned.

All of which Mr. Leigh knew perfectly well, and smiled quietly to himself, passing his glass each day at dinner across the crystal carafe he had brought back from Florence, and dutifully drinking the Jacobite toast—"To the King over the water."

Humphrey and Dick took their uncle at his word, for the cousins were old playmates, and scarce a day passed but one or other of them

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rode in at the Manor gates, more especially Master Richard Ormerod, who seemed to have a great deal to say to pretty Peggy, and right serious conversation at that, among the clipped yew hedges of the old-world garden, and in the pleached alley, at whose end was the ha-ha overlooking the lush meadows where the cattle grazed.

CHAPTER III

THE CROSSED SWORDS

TIME flew unheeded by the young folk at Ormerod Hall, and July glided imperceptibly into August without any of them noticing it.

The boys had meanwhile made friends with Mr. Ned Nethersole during their daily rides, and were loud in his praise; but Josiah Wakefield, the usher, had departed with his cloak-bag the day following his appearance at the village hostelry, giving out that he was going to Manchester.

It happened that the road led past the gate of the Manor House, and the usher, first glancing back with a quick, furtive look, turned aside and walked into the grounds with the assured step and smile of a man who is certain of a welcome.

Uncle Tom Leigh was awaiting him in a snug summer-house overlooking the ha-ha, where wine and glasses had been placed on the little table, and the pair sat hour after hour in close conversation, most of it in French.

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When the Jacobite agent took his departure his cloak-bag was heavier for the sum of two thousand guineas which his host had handed to him in aid of the “Good Cause,” and the shadows were already lengthening across the cornfields.

“Go no farther than Altringham to-night,” said Uncle Tom Leigh, as they shook hands warmly. “Since I cannot persuade you to stay till morning here, put up at The Unicorn, in the Market Place, for beyond that the road is lonely over Broad Heath, and ‘twill be safer to travel by daylight with the gold you carry.”

“I will take your advice, Mr. Leigh,” smiled the Pretender’s emissary. “But have no fear, for not only do I carry a brace of trusty pistols and know how to use them, but this innocent-looking staff of mine hath a sword blade concealed in its heart, so woe betide any footpad I may encounter.”

But for all his brave words, Josiah Wakefield quickened his pace when he came to the footbridge beside the ford, for there the old road climbed through a leafy dell over which the trees hung, deepening its gloom.

It happened suddenly, as such things do, and the masked figure was upon him in a trice, the

tall brown horse with the four white stockings standing still as a statue while its rider thrust a cold steel muzzle into Master Wakefield's neck-cloth.

“Move a finger and you die!” said a muffled voice, as the terrified Jacobite let fall the cloak-bag, which gave out an unmistakable ring of gold pieces.

The highwayman slipped to the ground, slid a practised hand into his victim’s coat pockets, tossing the pistols he found there away into the bushes one after the other, and almost before Wakefield had time to gasp out “Villain!” he had snatched up the heavy valise, vaulted back into his saddle, and was away down the winding dell at a gallop!

The tall undergrowth hid him as he splashed through the ford, and when he bounded out up the opposite bank the brown horse had left his four white stockings behind him in the river!

Josiah Wakefield pressed the spring of his swordstick and recovered his courage too late. His shout of “Stop thief!” rang on the empty air, and with a groan of anguish he saw his assailant, already a mere speck, vanishing in the gathering dusk in the direction of Ashley Mills.



“Move a finger and you die!” said a muffled voice.”

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“Fool that I was!” he cried. “Leigh must never know the fate of his guineas. The villain’s face I saw not, but I could swear to the horse anywhere!”

After a long search he succeeded in finding his pistols in a bed of stinging nettles, and it being quite dark by that time Mr. Josiah Wakefield made no stay at The Unicorn after all, but tramped on without a halt through the dreary, flat country, until the lights of Manchester twinkled in front of him.

Taking it all in all, his stay in Cheshire had not benefited the rebel cause overmuch, either in men or money; but to be a spy one must also be something of a philosopher, and it is easy to be philosophic when the gold you have lost is not your own!

One blazing hot day about the middle of August, Uncle Egerton at the head of the dining-table suddenly cried: “Egad, what is this? Yonder comes Squire Daracotte on his chestnut mare, riding as if his life depended on it.”

Dick had not returned, having gone over to the Manor House that morning, and Mrs. Ormerod clasped her mitten hands in alarm.

“Something has surely happened to Richard!” she cried.

“Stuff and nonsense!” exclaimed the major. “What could happen to him? You’re enough to cause a panic in the garrison, Mary!”

All the same he felt for his stick, and hobbled out into the hall with Humphrey, reaching the outer door as Dashing Daracotte reined up in a shower of foam, shouting: “The Pretender has landed in Scotland! There’s a price of £30,000 on his head, and the Scottish rebels are rallying to the scoundrel! What do ye think of it, major?”

“Stap my vitals!” gasped Uncle Egerton.

Exactly what he meant by that I have never been quite able to discover, but his face flushed the colour of his old red coat.

“Gad’s life!” he continued. “And with the King in Hanover and but a handful of troops on the other side of the border we shall have those naked Highlanders among us before we know where we are. What’s to be done, Daracotte?” And the disabled soldier pointed to his wooden leg, as much as to say that if it hadn’t been for his misfortune everything would have been all right.

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“ What’s to be done, Ormerod? ” laughed the fire-eating squire hoarsely. “ We’ve got to arm men in every shire in England. I’ve ridden the rounds of twenty houses since I had the news two hours ago, bidding all our friends meet me at The Load of Hay to-night, there to enrol themselves in Daracotte’s Light Horse ; and you shall put ‘em through their facings, major, for no one knows better than yourself how to turn ‘em into stout soldiers.”

“ Don’t sit there, man! ” exclaimed the old dragoon officer. “ Come inside and we can talk matters over.”

“ Nay, I am for Hoo Green and Great Budworth and Arley, to set the ball a-rolling and whip up every man who can ride a horse and bring a brace of pistols to the muster. Government will send us swords, I doubt not, and if they don’t, well, we must make shift with such as we have. Eight o’clock to-night, remember.”

“ I’ll be there! ” cried Uncle Egerton.

“ And I, too! ” echoed Humphrey.

“ Spoken like a lad of spirit! ” laughed Dashing Daracotte. “ Ormerod, we’ll make your two nephews cornets in Dashing Daracotte’s Light Horse, eh? ” And wrenching his sweating mare

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round, the squire spurred off, brandishing his jockey cap and bellowing out wild hunting cries as he disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Outside on the highway he nearly collided with Dick coming in the opposite direction like the wind, and both had to pull aside, the toe of Dick's boot, as it was, catching Daracotte's stirrup-iron and almost unseating him.

"I see by your face, boy, that you have the news already!" shouted the squire. "To the Hall with you, where they will tell you what we have planned!"

Dick's face was flushed and his eyes unusually bright, but he said no word as Daracotte went roaring on his way, for underneath his coat he carried something against which his heart pounded violently—something which the fingers of dark-eyed Peggy had placed there not half an hour ago, and which he had sworn to treasure with his life.

Humphrey spied him coming, and with a shout to Mobberley intercepted his brother before he could ride round to the stables.

"Come with me, Dick!" he cried, his own face flaming with excitement. "The moment is here at last, though not in the manner we had

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thought!" And as Dick dismounted, still without a word, his brother took him by the arm and almost dragged him into the room where Colonel Ormerod's portrait confronted them.

Beneath the frame hung two crossed swords with those close basket-hilts used by our cavalry at that period, very similar to the Highland clay-mores of our own time.

"Dick, old fellow!" cried Humphrey, taking them down. "Here are our father's blades which were to be ours when we were old enough to use them with honour. There is nothing to choose between them, but take your pick," and Richard Ormerod's fingers closed mechanically on the grip of one of the swords.

All the colour faded out of his face, but Humphrey in his excitement did not notice it at first.

"'Tis no use waiting for our commissions as matters go," he continued. "There is to be a muster at The Load of Hay to-night, when loyal subjects of His Majesty will be enrolled for Dashing Daracotte's Light Horse, and the squire, who was here but a few moments ago, has promised uncle that we shall ride as cornets in the troop."

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Then he stopped short, as he became aware that his brother was looking at him fixedly, with great tenderness in those deep-set eyes of his.

“No Daracotte’s Light Horse for me, Humphrey!” said Richard Ormerod, laying his left hand on his brother’s shoulder.

“But, man alive, why not? ’Tis a famous chance! If we stop at home until the Regency sends for us the campaign will be over.”

“ ’Twill last longer than you think, Humphrey,” replied Dick, a smile of superior knowledge parting his lips for a moment, and then changing into one of infinite sadness as he looked his twin brother full in the face. “There are two sides to every question, Humphrey, and though we may see differently, I doubt not we shall both use these blades with honour, as our father wished us.”

With a quick movement of his hand he drew out that hidden something which Peggy Leigh had given him, and held aloft the White Cockade.

“Take your sword to the muster if you will, brother, and wield it for German George! Mine will be drawn in the cause of Bonnie Prince Charlie!”

CHAPTER IV

THE WHITE COCKADE

HUMPHREY, white to the lips, fell back a step and gazed in speechless amazement at his brother, and the pendulum of the tall clock behind him swung backwards and forwards three times before he could find his voice.

“Dick, you are stark, staring mad!” he cried. “Never in all the history of our house has there been such a thing as an Ormerod turning rebel!”

“Admitted, Humphrey; but the fact proves nothing one way or the other. Moreover, brother of mine, a good deal hangs on what the word rebel may be held to mean.”

Humphrey’s eyes blazed.

“Come, Dick, at least be honest with me, if not with yourself! A rebel is a man who fights against his lawful king.”

“And there I think I have you, Humph!” smiled Richard. “Who is my lawful king? Certainly not the Elector of Hanover while the son and grandson of James II are still alive!”

“I knew it!” cried Humphrey Ormerod. “This is the teaching of that hound Wakefield! The Stuarts forfeited their rights by their many misdeeds, and King George was accounted good enough for our father to lay down his life in his cause. Look at that portrait, Dick! Does it say nothing to you?”

“Men have been mistaken before to-day in the side on which they have drawn their swords.”

“Tush! You had not used to be so glib with your tongue until that black-faced scoundrel came to Lymm. You cannot mean what you say! Have you forgotten our mother? Have you thought how she will take this blow?”

A quiver passed over Dick’s handsome face.

“Richard?—Humphrey?—what is all this? Surely my boys are not quarrelling?” said Mrs. Ormerod, who had heard the raised voices.

She looked at the naked weapon which each gripped, and the two faces: Humphrey’s very white, the square jaw set squarer, and Dick’s reddening and paling by turns, and she clasped her hands on her bosom, realizing instinctively that this was no schoolboy quarrel.

“That thing Dick has pinned in his hat will tell you better than I can, mother!” exclaimed

Humphrey, pointing a contemptuous finger at the White Cockade. “Wakefield, the usher, has ruined him, and Dick is out for the Pretender, unless we can prevent it ! ”

“Richard, give that thing to me ! ” said Mrs. Ormerod. “This is no time for silly pranks ! ” And she held out her hand.

“Mother dear, forgive me, but I cannot ! I have sworn allegiance to my rightful king ! ”

“Oh, come, this is sheer madness ! ” And neither of them had ever heard her speak so sternly. “Your Uncle Egerton must bring you to a sense of your duty, and the usher who has poisoned your mind shall suffer for his knavery ! ”

“Eh ? What usher ? What knavery ? What’s going on here ? ” And the maimed hero stumped in.

“Egerton, I implore you to be patient with my poor boy ! He has been too much of late at the Manor House, and my unfortunate brother and his family have distilled their wicked poison into his brain ! ”

“Eh ? ” shouted the old soldier. “The White Cockade in Ormerod Hall ? Take it out, sirrah ! Give it to me this moment ! ”

“I grieve to disobey you, uncle,” said Dick very firmly; “but I am old enough to form my own opinion.”

“Oh, are you? We’ll see about that! But you’re not too old to go to your own room, where I shall lock you in until you’ve come to your senses. Zounds! Come along, you rascal!” And seizing him by the wrist before he could step back, the irate major dragged the young Jacobite towards the door with a very undignified jerk. “Come on! Remember I stand in the place of your father, who fell on the field of honour, while Providence must have spared me for the express purpose of seeing that his sons followed the same glorious path!”

For a moment Mrs. Ormerod stood looking after the pair as the major hobbled up the oak staircase, breathing fire and smoke, and swearing like a trooper; and as they turned the angle of the first landing they heard him bellowing: “Silence, you graceless young dog! Bedlam Hospital is the place for you, if bread and water do not bring you speedily to reason!”

And then Humphrey caught her as she swooned, and another shadow fell over Ormerod Hall!

At the end of half an hour they heard the tap-tap of the wooden leg descending again, and Uncle Egerton joined them.

Mrs. Ormerod was seated on the sofa, where Humphrey had placed her, while he and his three younger sisters brought her round, and there was the odour of burnt feathers in the room.

The major was purple in the face, and they saw in a moment that he had apparently been unable to shake the boy in his resolution.

“Can’t do anything with the fool, Mary!” he said, in a voice so unlike his own that they could scarcely understand him. “Obstinate as a mule, talks like a lawyer—won’t listen to reason of any kind. I’ve stormed, I’ve sworn, I’ve threatened, but the young dog’s set on his own destruction and the disgrace of our family, and I’ve locked him in. I’m going to tell Mobberley to cut the ivy so that he can’t escape by the window, and when I’ve seen it done that scoundrel Tom Leigh shall have the length of my tongue and a taste of my horsewhip!”

“No, Egerton, you must not add to the scandal that will be in everyone’s mouth unless we can prevent it,” urged the unhappy mother. “To-morrow I will go to the Manor House

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myself and forbid my nieces coming to the Hall again."

"The jades would never have been here at all if I'd had my way, Mary!" stammered the major, seeking refuge in his snuff-box. "Thank Heaven, Humphrey is in his right mind! Egad! I have not felt anything so deeply since they gave me a bullet to bite at, and I watched our surgeon getting out his infernal saws on the field of Dettingen!"

"When I am more composed, I will talk to our poor, misguided boy," moaned Mrs. Ormerod.

"You will do nothing of the kind!" snapped her brother-in-law, "for I've got the key of his room in my pocket!"

Then he stumped out, and the girls sobbed in chorus, and Humphrey ground his teeth as he thought of Josiah Wakefield, with his oily smile and the blue shave that extended high up his cheek-bones.

'As for the cause of all their trouble, he lay on his four-post bed, his flushed face buried in the crook of his arm, conscious that he had made a bad start in the business, and wondering how he was going to accomplish those long leagues

that lay between him and the Pretender's headquarters when Wakefield should send him the word, which he had solemnly promised to do.

His heart was torn with the misery he was bringing to them all, but the wily Jacobite spy was a shrewd judge of character, and knew what he had been about when he sowed his traitorous seed in Richard Ormerod's fertile imagination, and that when he beckoned, his pupil would obey.

Later on, when the lad shifted his position and placed his hands beneath his throbbing head, he saw the sun creeping round to the west, glinting redly on the gilded weather-vane above the stable clock; and he heard the clatter of hoofs, too, and his uncle's voice, and knew that he was climbing into his saddle by the aid of the mounting-block, and riding away with Humphrey to the muster.

“Egad, boy, your mother is right,” Uncle Egerton was saying. “This matter of Dick's must not go beyond the park gate, and I will take great care that the fool does not get as far as that.”

“But what are you to say to-night to the squire, uncle, to account for his absence?”

“Drat the fellow, I hadn’t thought of that!” said the major, pursing out his underlip. “I’ve got it! I’ll tell ‘em he’s confined to his room, that it won’t be safe for him to appear in public for the present, which is perfectly true.” And they turned into the inn yard, where they found everything in a mighty bustle.

Every stall was filled, and a long row of horses tethered to the paling that divided the yard from the bowling-green, where a great uproar of voices and laughter was going on.

“They be calling for your honour,” said the landlord of *The Load of Hay*, a perky little man in shirt sleeves and red vest, with long gaiters buttoned up to mid thigh; and when they had helped the warrior from his steed, and his scarlet coat passed through the gate into the garden, a roar of welcome greeted him.

The first person Humphrey set eyes on was their new friend, Mr. Nethersole, whose face struck the lad as looking strangely grave. But perhaps that was because the rector had button-holed him, and was talking loudly about Church and State and the Constitution, and that same Act of Settlement to which poor absent Dick had alluded.

The moment Dashing Daracotte saw them coming he lifted up a “view hallo” at the top of his tremendous voice, which seemed to set scores of dogs barking all over the place.

“Here he comes at last! This way, major!” roared the squire, whose wig was set awry and his face almost the colour of Uncle Egerton’s regimentals; for I am sorry to have to recount that the jovial fox-hunter had drunk too many healths to King George and too much confusion to his enemies to be accounted strictly sober, even in that hard-drinking age.

The maimed warrior found a seat reserved for him beside Daracotte, and at a table in front of them writing materials had been placed among innumerable glasses.

There were quite a hundred and fifty people present on the green, the gentry grouped in the vicinity of the table, while a little apart thronged huntsmen, and whips, grooms and serving-men, all eager to join in an adventure that appealed to their sporting instincts even more perhaps than to their patriotism.

Coats of every colour and wigs of every kind made up a gay scene, with the tall crimson holly-hocks against the sunset for a background and a

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cloud of blue tobacco smoke drifting above the wagging heads.

The squire and the major whispered together for several minutes, and as Uncle Egerton dipped a grey goose-quill in the inkpot Mr. Daracotte stood up.

“ Gentlemen all ! ” he said, his bloodshot eyes roving over the faces of his friends and neighbours. “ I’m a better hand at a hurdle than a speech, as most of you know ; so first we’ll empty a bumper to His Majesty, and then get to the work that has brought us here. Are ye all filled ? ”

“ Ay, Jack, an’ some of us full ! ” laughed a voice.

“ Then success to King George, and down with all Pretenders and Papishers ! ”

Poor Dick in his prison heard the shout that went floating over the fields, and knew what it meant.

“ I thank ye ! ” cried the squire. “ Now then, who’s for Dashing Daracotte’s Light Horse ? The major is waiting for your names, and the first on the roll is our young friend Humphrey here. Where an Ormerod leads none of us need be ashamed to follow ! ” Which

produced another shout that made Humphrey's ears tingle.

Sam Brewster, the poacher, cursed the lame leg that robbed him of all part in the business, as he watched through a gap in the hedgerow, and saw them crowding eagerly round the table.

Earlier in the afternoon he had held a hurried conversation with Mr. Nethersole, the result of a chance meeting with Corporal Mobberley, and now he had been trying for the last quarter of an hour to catch his eye, having fresh news of importance to communicate; but that gentleman kept his back obstinately turned in his direction, and so far had made no attempt to enrol himself, greatly to Brewster's surprise.

Not that every man who elbowed his way to the perspiring major did so with the intention of joining the new corps. Some were too advanced in years; others, like the watcher, had some physical infirmity; while some again were too fat to be eligible for service in the Light Horse; but these all subscribed liberally to the stock purse of the new regiment, and Uncle Egerton's quill was kept mighty busy recording their loyal donations on another list.

Already more than a hundred volunteers had

been enrolled, the jubilant squire shaking each heartily by the hand, when Major Ormerod's eye fell on the tall figure of Ned Nethersole, faultlessly attired, as usual, in riding-breeches and knee-boots.

“ Egad, gentlemen, room for Mr. Nethersole yonder, the true pattern and build for a light horseman ! ” he laughed. “ Put your name here, sir, at the foot of the list, and then we'll cry the muster closed ! ”

“ You must hold me excused, major, since very urgent affairs call me out of the neighbourhood to-morrow,” said the popular young gentleman, not without a certain heightening of the colour in his cheeks.

CHAPTER V

“ MR. NED NEITHERSIDE ! ”

THE ex-officer of dragoons, the stump of his wooden leg sticking straight out like a bowsprit on the other side of the table, fell back in his chair and looked at the speaker.

“ I could not have heard you aright, sir ! ” he gasped. “ Surely for an upstanding young man on the best side of thirty there are no affairs more urgent than his sovereign’s welfare ? ”

“ Admitted ; but is not that welfare sufficiently assured by the brave list before you ? ”

A curious frown of sudden suspicion wrinkled the major’s brow.

“ Zounds ! But you seem to me to avoid the point at issue ! ” he said, with considerable heat. “ Stap my vitals ! Has someone been tampering with your loyalty, Mr. Nethersole ? ”

“ My loyalty is not in question, Major Ormerod ! ” was the cold reply, as all conversation hushed, and he felt every eye bent upon him.

“ Then why in heaven’s name don’t you join

up, sir?" came the angry retort. "Those who are not for us are against us, you know. Either you are for the King or for the Pretender—or," he added with a prodigious sneer, "must we christen you 'Mr. Ned Neitherside'?"

The young gentleman, his broken nose seeming to give a more sinister expression to his otherwise handsome face than any had seen upon it before, walked deliberately up to the table and flung a heavy bag down with a force that sent the quill pens flying.

"Had you not already given a limb for your country, Major Ormerod, you should answer this insult after the fashion usual among gentlemen!" he said, very sternly. "That trifle towards the funds of Daracotte's Light Horse ought to be sufficient to show which way my heart lies. You are welcome to call me Ned 'Neitherside' if it pleases you. For myself, I wish you good night!" And, swinging round, he strode away through the crowd, which fell back to give him passage.

"Od's rabbit it, Ormerod!" exclaimed the squire thickly. "You have done wrong. I'd answer for Ned Nethersole with my own life. How do you know he mayn't have a mother

a-dying, or what not? Why, man alive, there's a thousand guineas in that bag if there's a groat, and yet you almost called him a rebel! ”

“We shall see whether I am wrong,” grunted the peppery old dragoon. “In the meantime I will enter this purse to the credit of Mr. Ned ‘Neitherside’ until I prove it to the contrary. Don't talk to me, Daracotte—we're living in strange times. If yonder gamecock thinks himself affronted he knows where I am to be found, and a man with a wooden leg can fire a pistol even if he cannot use his sword. But mark my words—after to-night you will see no more of Master ‘Neitherside’—unless you come across him in Scotland, which I wager is not unlikely! ”

There were many among that throng who would have stayed young Nethersole and tried to patch up the quarrel, but the look on his face warned them that he was in no mood to be trifled with, and untying his horse he rode out of the inn yard, leaving them looking after him, and saying among themselves: “ 'Twas too bad. Th'owd man'd no right to say what he did, and Maister Nethersole given a thousand guineas for t'King's Cause into t'bargain. T'major's

never forgiven him for winning t'rubber at bowls."

When they came to count them, the guineas were found to amount to two thousand, a truly noble gift for any cause; but they little knew of the happenings at the Hall which had shaken the hero of Dettingen to his very soul, and made him scent a spy of the Pretender lurking behind every haystack.

"I might have known 'twould have been wiser had I stayed away to-night!" murmured Nethersole, turning his head sharply as a dark figure crashed through the hedgerow. "Oh, it's you, Sam, is it? No more ill news, I trust?"

"Well, it bain't of the best by ony manner o' means," said the poacher, laying his hand on the stirrup-leather and lowering his voice as he looked up into the face of the mounted man. "I tould your honour what t'corporal tould me this arternoon, as 'ow the two young gentlemen a'most came to blows, and were found each with a sword in his hand. I've seen Mobberley again. Maister Richard be a prisoner in his room. Mobberley has cut away the ivy roots by t'major's orders, so that he shan't run away. What do you make of it? Why should a fine lad like him

want to run away at all, when the whole of t’parish be out to fight for King George?”

“Don’t you see why, Sam?” said Nethersole bitterly. “It’s quite plain to me. Dick Ormerod’s turned Jacobite. I suspect Mistress Peggy’s bright eyes have had more to do with it than a little.”

“Ay, the fule! ’Twill break his mother’s heart, sure as eggs. I tould ye they’d lost one son already and the colonel killed. She’s the sweetest dame for many a long mile, and I don’t know what t’poor folk will do wi’out her come Christmastime. I’m reet glad th’owd gentleman’s laid him by t’heels.”

Mr. Edward Nethersole smiled for the first time since his encounter with the major.

“I thought you were a shrewder judge of character, Sam,” he said. “I’ve taken a great liking to the young Ormerods in the past few weeks, and from what I’ve seen of Master Dick they’ll have to clap him in the stocks if they want to keep him out of danger when his mind’s once set on going; and, between you and me and the gate-post, Sam,” he added, in an undertone, “if I were a lad of seventeen again the young Prince would appeal far more strongly to me

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than our Hanoverian monarch, who can hardly speak English."

"Why, Maister Nethersole, you bain't a Jacobite, be ye?" And his listener laughed.

"No, Sam, I am not. Surely 'tis bad enough to be a gentleman highwayman without the stain of treason on one's soul? But a word in your ear, my friend." And the rider stooped from his saddle. "The game's up for me here—at any rate, for a while—and I have it in my mind to see some of the fun when they begin to fight in real earnest."

"You're never going to let what t'major said fright ye away, are ye?" exclaimed the poacher.

"No, Sam, but I've played those four white feet a bit too often for safety hereabouts. I must try my luck farther afield. I've thought once or twice lately that men have looked at my berry-brown beauty rather askance, and now that Major Ormerod has publicly thrown doubt on my loyalty, I'm going north for a spell before folk grow suspicious."

"Oh dear, and you makkin' your fortune, too, on these roads!"

"Yes, they've yielded a pretty good harvest, thanks to your help, Sam, and the folly of these

tipsy gentlemen with more money than brains,” said Mr. Nethersole, with a regretful sigh. “But all good things come to an end, and I don’t wish mine to be the end of a rope.”

“Talkin’ of that, sir,” said Sam Brewster, “do ye mind that fellow who came into T’ Load o’ Hay one morning when you and t’squire were there? You left a’most at once, but I talked to you about him arterwards, and how he pumped Mr. Daracotte—a man with a blue muzzle and a mighty glib tongue.”

“I remember; what about him?” said Nethersole quickly.

“Why, I shouldn’t be surprised if you were going to have a rival on the road, for he’s back again, I see, to-day, and ‘High Toby’s’ his game. I saw him ride into Dog Fox Spinney a while ago, and tie his horse up there—a serviceable nag enough, with a well-filled pair of saddlebags an’ a brace of long barkers.”

The darkness veiled the sudden look of revelation that came into Edward Nethersole’s face, and he gave a low whistle.

“There’s more in your words than you wot of, Sam,” he said. “That man, who was an

usher at Lymm school, is a spy of the Pretender's. I've reason to know that he spent some hours with Mr. Leigh at the Manor House before he went to Manchester. Where did he go after he tied his horse up? Did he see you?"

"Does anybody ever see me when I don't wish to be seen?" chuckled the lame poacher. "I'll tell ye what he did. He pulled out his watch, looked up at t' sky, and lying down at the foot of a tree, was sound asleep in five minutes."

His listener nodded.

"The whole thing's as clear as daylight, Sam," he said suddenly. "Dick Ormerod means to bolt to-night, and t'other man has come for him. Go to my house and clap the saddle on Bright Eyes. If you find she's not there in the morning you'll feed the other nags and look after them whilst I'm away, saying nothing to anybody. I want a word with my gentleman with the blue muzzle, and I'm going now to see whether his horse is still in the spinney. If any should ask you where I am, I've gone into Yorkshire." And the next moment Sam Brewster was alone, listening to the retreating sound of

the cantering hoofs, with an uncomfortable feeling that trouble was looming in the future, and that of no common sort.

For an hour or more Dick Ormerod had paced backwards and forwards up and down the locked room, his pulses throbbing wildly.

The distant bursts of cheering from the village had made him spring from the bed and close the open casement to shut out the hateful sound, and he had watched the long line of angry sunset above the tree-tops of Dunham Park, inwardly fuming with rage at his own stupidity for betraying his secret convictions too soon.

He knew that his new friend had mysterious business in Manchester with a certain Mr. Townley, which might take him some time; but any day the message might come, and here was he a prisoner!

Corporal Mobberley had carried out his master's instructions to the letter, as he always did, and his ruthless axe had removed the thick ivy growth that would have made such an excellent ladder.

He had heard Humphrey and the major return half an hour ago, and knew that the talk

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would be all of Daracotte and the doings at the village inn, and poor Dick groaned aloud as he reflected on the improbability of Mr. Wakefield's message being allowed to reach him at all under the circumstances; and, wondering how long his angry uncle would keep him in captivity, he pressed his burning forehead against the cool window-pane.

The bar of light in the west had almost faded away now, and the owls were hooting.

Then he started back, as a handful of gravel struck the glass against which he leaned.

Was it high-spirited Cousin Peggy come to bid him take heart? he thought, lifting the latch of the window and opening it gently.

The moon had not yet risen, and there was a velvety darkness over everything that baffled even his keen eyes, until a soft whistle came up from below.

“Dick, are you there?” said a low voice that made his heart sink.

“Yes, and like to remain here, since they have locked me in my room, sir!” he replied, with a muffled sigh.

“Tut, tut! Have you forgotten the ivy?”

“The ivy has gone!”

“MR. NED NEITHERSIDE!”

This time the whistle was one of surprise, but Josiah Wakefield was a man of resource.

“ Tie the sheets of your bed together,” he called up, making a trumpet of his hands. “ If the rope be not long enough there are bed hangings, doubtless. I would saddle your horse, but the hounds do not know me and would betray us; so lose no time, and join me on the road by Dog Fox Spinney as soon as may be. I can only wait one hour ! ”

Dick’s heart seemed to jump into his throat as he stepped softly back across the room and listened, for a door had closed on the ground floor of the house.

The sound he dreaded to hear was the tap-tap of that wooden leg; but silence followed, and he knew that the family must be at supper, with the servants all in another wing.

He dared not stay to strike a light, and fumbled clumsily in the darkness as he dragged off the coverlet and sheets, which he twisted up and knotted with all the haste he could muster.

It seemed to his feverish imagination that the hour must be already nearly gone; but at last he pressed his lips to Peggy’s White Cockade, set the three-cornered hat firmly on his tousled

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head, and placing his father's sword between his teeth, climbed through the open window and reached the ground in safety.

“Down, Jupiter, down, good fellow!” he whispered to the great yellow mastiff that tried to fawn upon him from the length of his chain; and then he was in the stables, where his fingers seemed all thumbs, until at last he found himself leading his own roan nag out through the little wicket that opened into the fields.

The rim of the rising moon peeped over the chimney-stacks of the home he was leaving, perhaps for the last time, and his eyes filled as he wondered if they would ever see that grand old Hall again! But he had chosen his own path, and lest he should falter in his determination at the last moment, the young rebel turned his head no more, but rode along the hedge bottom for Dog Fox Spinney.

CHAPTER VI

FLIGHT

“**T**IS not often I quarrel with the moon, but I could have wished she had hidden her foolish face for another hour or so to-night, there are so many folk abroad; though thank goodness the most of them are too deeply in their cups to recognize you.”

Thus spoke Mr. Wakefield, as he and Dick left the trees and pressed their horses into a trot, taking care to keep on the shadow side of the road.

They were still halloing and roaring out patriotic songs at the village inn, but the company was breaking up now, and by twos and threes tipsy gentlemen, flushed with excess of loyalty, had ridden past the spinney on their way to their several homes.

At last, feeling it too dangerous to linger any longer in case of pursuit, the two conspirators had taken their courage in both hands and made

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a bold push for the north, Dick's cockade hidden in his pocket again for the time being.

“Once past the town we need have no fear,” said Wakefield; but he had scarcely spoken when round a bend of the road, at which he had been awaiting their arrival, the graceful figure of the highwayman confronted them, reining in his berry-brown roadster in the most natural manner in the world.

“Why, Dick!” he cried, as though it were a great surprise. “Whither away, my lad? One does not often meet you abroad at this hour!”

To push past would have been to excite suspicion, and, following his companion's example, poor Richard pulled up.

“I am but for a ride with my friend, Mr. Nethersole,” he stammered.

“A friend of thine, boy, is a friend of mine. Good evening to you, sir!” laughed his tormentor. “But I am Nethersole no longer, Dick, since your uncle has given me another name at the muster over there. Because I would not join the Light Horse he calls me Ned ‘Neitherside.’ What do you think of that?”

“And might I take the liberty of inquiring, sir, why you did not enrol in Dashing Daracotte's

Drunkards?" said Mr. Wakefield with his oiliest smile. "Was it the corps or the cause that had not your support?"

"That is a question, Mr. Wakefield, that requires a little consideration these days," replied Ned "Netherside," lowering his voice.

"How? You know me by name, then?"

"Yes, I have a memory, and I know a good deal!" was the ambiguous answer. "'Tis for that reason that I should like to ride with you to-night, in spite of the old adage that 'two are company and three are none.'"

The spy leaned forward in his saddle and stretched out a quick hand.

"Do I gather from that that you are with us, Mr. Nethersole?" he whispered eagerly.

"I will ride with you as you do not say me nay," said the rascal, taking the proffered fingers in his own, without betraying the itch they felt to grasp the man by the weasand and shake the life out of him. "As for the rest, I am content to let the future take care of itself. Do we understand one another?"

"My dear sir!—most excellent young gentleman! I admire your discretion!" exclaimed the Pretender's agent. "'Tis indeed not safe to air

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one's thoughts in this neighbourhood. Shall we press on and talk later?"

"I think so," nodded Ned "Netherside," with a glance behind him. "I hear a bunch of riders approaching, Squire Daracotte among them, so let us gallop for a mile or so to breathe our nags."

As he rode his mare upon the other side of Dick's roan the boy laid a hand on his bridle arm, his face radiant in the moonlight.

"You make me happier, Mr. Nethersole, than I had ever hoped to be again!" he exclaimed impulsively. "I feared you would have been against me like the rest."

"Nay, boy, I love you both far too well, you and your brother, to be against you!" laughed Ned "Netherside," glancing under his closed eyelids at the Pretender's agent, for they were just approaching the ford and the leafy dell where two thousand guineas had changed hands on a certain night you may remember; but Josiah Wakefield was so clever in all the arts of dissimulation that he betrayed no sign of what must have been in his heart, and soon they were clattering through the market-place of Altrincham, where folk were going to bed.

“ ‘Tis tempting enough to take a stirrup-cup at The Unicorn here,” laughed Wakefield, “ but safer to put a few leagues between us and the Cheshire squires.” And they left the little red-brick town behind them at a brisk trot, which sometimes grew into a gallop and again fell to an easy canter.

“ Don’t forget that I must buy a sheath for my naked sword,” said Dick, as they pulled up where Old Trafford Bar closed the road.

“ Time enough when we reach Proud Preston in daylight,” smiled Josiah Wakefield, thrusting a hand into his breeches pocket. “ Ho, there! Gate, gate! I’ll pay the toll while the pair of you slip through when old sleepy-head has opened for us ! ”

All unconscious of what had been happening in the wing above them, the little family party —and how terribly small that vacant chair seemed to make it!—sat round the table with scanty appetite.

Mrs. Ormerod ate nothing; and poor Humphrey, feeling like a dog that has newly lost its tail, toyed with his plate, all the joy of the muster

spoiled for him by his brother's absence, and that unfortunate outburst of Uncle Egerton's against their new friend, for whom both he and Dick had imbibed a mighty liking.

As for the major—who, by the way, had left the incident unmentioned, because at the bottom of his warm, impulsive heart he was beginning to feel that he had perhaps been too severe—he made amends for the others by a bold attack upon the cold sirloin, and fortified himself with his favourite claret.

“Zounds, Mary, 'twas a grand sight to see those good fellows tumbling over themselves to sign the roll!” he cried. “The Pretender had better give the shire a wide berth if Cope should chance to let him pass the border, which I'll stake my soul he won't!”

“Surely there is little chance that the misguided young gentleman will be allowed to reach England!” said Mrs. Ormerod in a voice of alarm. “You have said yourself that all will be over in a fortnight at most!”

“And so it will, if those jacks-in-office only support John Cope instead of quarrelling among themselves. They want the King here; and, 'fore gad, we'll soon see him back at the head of

his troops, so you may rest content in your bed, my dear Mary."

Mrs. Ormerod's one prayer now was that this wretched rebellion would be stamped out before either of her boys could have art or part in it, and she thought of the one upstairs as her brother-in-law finished his bottle.

"Egerton," she said in a troubled voice of reproach, "Richard has had no supper!"

"Stap my vitals, I'd forgotten all about him!" snapped the major, making a wry face as one who is compelled to return to an unpleasant subject. "Ring for Mobberley to fetch a tray, Humphrey; no, Mary, a night to himself will do him good. To-morrow will be time enough for him to see the mother whose affection he would requite so ill."

She knew he was right and sat down again, and the major and his henchman departed to feed the prisoner, leaving dead silence behind them.

It was at the very moment when the trio were passing the toll-gate that Uncle Egerton, with a brass candlestick in his hand, was in the act of unlocking Dick's bedroom door.

"Now, you graceless young dog!" he growled, stumping in. "Here is Mobberley with

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some supper for you, and far more than you deserve!"

The flame of the candle flattened out in the strong draught from the casement as the major peered about him.

"Where are you hiding yourself?" he demanded, and master and man gave a startled shout as they both saw the knotted sheets tied to the bottom bed-post.

"Drat my wig, your honour!" cried the corporal, almost letting fall the tray; "if Maister Richard haven't been and took french leave arter all!"

Uncle Egerton hobbled to the window and looked down.

"Get all the men to horse!" he thundered, his face twitching oddly.

"Craving your honour's pardon, 'twill be little good save to set tongues a-wagging, unless Maister Richard be still in the stable."

"Go and see, then!" faltered the major. "Zounds! I'd rather have died at Dettingen than have lived to see this wretched day!"



"'Drat my wig!' cried the corporal; 'Master Richard
haven't took french leave arter all!'"

CHAPTER VII

SPIES OF THE PRETENDER

AT a sign from Josiah Wakefield the three travellers pulled their horses into a walk where the road mounted a little rise.

“We have done vastly well so far, having made something more than half our journey without interruption,” said the Jacobite agent. “Mark ye yonder house, with the blue slate roof and a cluster of barns in its rear?”

“One would be blind else, since ‘tis the only building in sight,” smiled Dick Ormerod. “But what of it?”

“Only that we shall stay there for the night, and there are worse places in the world than a snug Cumberland inn, Richard,” replied Mr. Wakefield. “I know the place well, having slept there more than once between clean sheets, and being on the highway to the north we are like to get what news there may be. What say you, Nethersole?”

“You are our guide, and by no means a bad

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one," assented Ned. "More than half-way, say you?"

"Thereabout, counting the end of our journey to be Edinburgh," said Wakefield. "We are but little short of Penrith, which means that we have ridden roughly a hundred miles since we started. Another fifteen will bring us to Carlisle, with less than eighty more before we see the Prince's banner flying from the castle on the rock."

The sun was setting as they reached the long stone building with a fuchsia growing over the door, and rode into a large yard at the back.

An old ostler, deaf as the stone walls, whose enormous thickness surprised Dick not a little, presented himself, but they sent him for water and the key of the cornbin, while they rubbed their horses down themselves.

As they came out of the dark stable the sun was dropping behind Skiddaw, and the crimson glow that met them filled the long room, where they found supper laid and waiting. A cheerful fire blazed on the wide hearth, and placing their pistols on the high-backed settle they lost no time in falling to, not sorry that they were the only

occupants of the apartment, with its stone floor and oak beams, whose windows looked out on to the high road.

“The good man is away into the town!” chuckled Wakefield. “They have had no news these two days, the landlady tells me, but when he returns I am in hopes that we shall hear something.”

Dick heard something already—the quick beat of hoofs on the road.

“This must be he, surely? He is stopping at the yard gate. No, he walks his horse; but since he comes by the same road we have travelled we’ll get no news from him.”

Some of the sunset was suddenly blotted out by the outline of a horse and rider, and as they passed so close to the wall that the toe of the man’s boot grated against it, he stooped and looked into the room.

“Hallo!” said Dick in a low voice. “That’s the gentleman we passed at Shap, the one who seemed to regard us curiously.”

“Such a handsome trio as ourselves is bound to attract attention!” laughed Ned “Netherside,” but at the same time he reached to the settle behind him, slipped his long pistols into

the skirt of his riding coat, and handed Wakefield's weapons across the table.

“One never knows,” he said softly, and the spy nodded.

They listened for the snick of the latch, but did not hear it; and after the silence had lasted a few moments Wakefield turned his chair round to the fire and began to fill his pipe from a brass Dutch tobacco-box engraved with curious figures.

Nethersole seated himself in one corner of the settle, stretching his long legs towards the cheery blaze, while Dick sat beside him, his elbows resting on his knees and his dark eyes staring into the heart of the fire.

“Phœbe, my child,” said Josiah Wakefield to the buxom maid who came in to see if the gentlemen wanted anything, “after you have removed these evidences of appetites well satisfied bring candles and a bowl of punch; draw the curtains, and when Tom Satterthwaite comes back from Penrith bid him join us.”

The serving-maid had soon whisked away the plates and dishes, set two lighted candles on the table, and was just about to draw the curtains when the same rider passed the window again.

“Who is that gentleman?” said Ned
“Neitherside.”

“ ’Tis Mr. Duckworthy from the Hall. He is one of our magistrates; ’tis not often he takes his glass here so late,” answered Phœbe, and mingling with the reply they heard the clatter of hoofs as the gentleman in question rode into the yard.

Dick intercepted a quick glance that passed between his two companions, and as the girl went out in quest of the punch Josiah Wakefield lowered his voice to a whisper.

“Remember,” he said quickly, “I am known here as ‘Mr. Lucy,’ and in the event of trouble our road lies straight through the town yonder for Carlisle.”

When Phœbe reappeared with the smoking punch a heavy tread followed her down the stone-flagged passage, and Mr. Duckworthy entered the room.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” he said in a loud, pompous voice.

“Good evening, sir,” replied the three travellers, to which Wakefield added the inquiry: “Is there any news from the north?”

“None that I wot of!” said Mr. Duck-

worthy, and he walked to the opposite chimney-corner and sat down.

He was a large, florid man, dressed in a green square-skirted coat with gilt buttons, the tops of his black riding-boots almost meeting the flaps of his buff-coloured vest; and they felt instinctively that the eyes beneath the grey brows were taking furtive stock of them from head to heel.

The girl had placed a bottle and glass beside him, with a clean clay pipe and a paper of tobacco; and as Dick watched him take a bunnel, or dried hemp stem, from one of the spill-holders, he was conscious that he himself was ignored by those inquisitive eyes, which moved rapidly from the face of Josiah Wakefield to that of Ned "Neitherside," and back again.

"Will you join us, sir?" said Wakefield, with an insinuating smile. "Mrs. Satterthwaite brews a great punch."

"Of which I have drunk well-nigh as many bowls as you and your companions have ridden miles to-day," was the tart reply. "How far have you come?"

"From Kendal by way of Shap Abbey," said Josiah Wakefield, still smiling.

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“Where I passed you on the road,” said the magistrate. “My glass is already filled, I thank you. You stay here to-night?”

“We do.”

“And to-morrow?”

“We take horse again.”

“Where for?” And there was no mistaking the authoritative ring in the question.

“As a matter of fact,” said Ned Nethersole from the other side of the table, “we go to Carlisle.”

“Upon what business?”

“Upon our own, sir!”

The grey brows frowned.

“I asked you a simple question, sir.”

“But a somewhat impertinent one, Mr. Duckworthy?”

“Eh? What? Since it seems you know my name you doubtless also know that I am a magistrate.”

“A fact you seem to be particularly well aware of yourself, sir! Is it a very remarkable thing that three gentlemen should be riding through Kendal to Carlisle upon their own business? I should be glad if you would come to the point. What is the object of your questioning?”

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“I have my suspicions,” said Mr. Duckworthy. “We live in strange times, and honest men speak openly of their affairs if they have nothing to conceal. You have my name off pat enough, and yet you refuse your own!”

“Egad, sir, and for the simple reason that you never asked it!” laughed the highwayman. “My name is Edward Nethersole. Does that satisfy you?”

The sound of several persons riding quickly past the window produced an immediate effect on the magistrate. He seemed to grow larger in his chair and to puff himself out with an increased sense of his own importance as half a dozen men entered the room with a sheepish “Good even to you, gentlemen!” and our three friends knew instinctively that they had come at Mr. Duckworthy’s bidding.

“Whither away so soon, Dick?” said Ned Nethersole, as the lad rose and stretched himself with a prodigious yawn.

“Whither but to bed, sir?” replied Dick, yawning again, and he walked slowly and stiffly into the passage.

The moment the door had closed behind him he stepped on tiptoe through the house and into

the yard, where the roan greeted his coming with a whinny of welcome as he entered the dark stable.

All trace of fatigue had disappeared, and with quick hands he saddled and bridled the three horses, meanwhile keeping an eye and an ear on the house.

Candles were burning in the kitchen window. All the rest was in darkness, and Mr. Duckworthy's roadster pawed the cobbles impatiently at the stable door, where his master had tied him to a ring in the wall.

Somewhere from the rising ground behind sheep were bleating on the hillside, and a curlew called from the open waste that stretched westward beyond the high road.

Dick Ormerod stroked the roadster's muzzle and made quick friends with the horse, passing his hand from neck to withers until it reached the holster buckets, where to his great surprise he found the pompous justice of the peace had left his pistols.

“We'll take the bite out of your jaws by way of a start,” he smiled to himself, and after opening the pans and spilling the priming he replaced them.

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Then he busied himself with the girth, which he loosened, undid the bit buckles, and stole back to the inn passage.

As he reached it he heard the snick of the latch from the front door of the wayside hostelry, which opened directly into the room where he had left his friends.

Above the murmur of voices Mr. Wakefield's rang out :

“ Ah, my old friend, Tom Satterthwaite ! And what news do you bring ? ” And the inn-keeper replied : “ Odd’s life, Mr. Lucy, so you are with us again, and I would I had better intelligence to give you. I chanced on my Lord Lonsdale’s head groom returning from Carlisle, and they tell him the rebels number already somewhere about five thousand men, with others joining in every day. The Pretender left Perth on the eleventh, and is marching south, ’tis thought, for Glasgow.”

A loud murmur followed the announcement, broken by the raucous voice of Mr. Duckworthy from his chimney-corner.

“ How, Satterthwaite, ” he said ; “ so you know this gentleman ? ”

“ Yes, sir. Mr. Lucy has stayed here several

times when he has been backward and forward along the road.”

“ Oh, he has, has he? Backward and forward along the road, eh? ” said Mr. Duckworthy scornfully.

“ Yes, sir, and since 'tis the King's highway, nor you nor any other man shall question my right to use it! Put that in your pipe and smoke it, sir, for you seem bent on stirring up strife, as though there were not enough trouble in the realm already! ”

Evidently Mr. Duckworthy was glaring at the supposed “ Mr. Lucy,” and “ Mr. Lucy ” was glaring at the magistrate, for the innkeeper interposed with a “ Gentlemen, gentlemen, if you please! ”

But Dick did not wait to hear more. His quick wits had already told him that the outer door still stood open after the innkeeper's entry, and running swiftly round the house he peeped in, to find, as he had surmised, that the attention of the whole room was focused on the pair.

One glance showed him that the six men who had previously entered were each armed with a stout cudgel, and as several of them had risen

to their feet the coming trouble was very close.

Mr. Wakefield's face was redder and more angry than he had ever seen it before, and though Ned "Neitherside" still continued to smoke, his right hand was thrust into the pocket of his riding-coat, which bulged suspiciously.

Very gently Dick passed his arm round the half-open door, and possessed himself of the enormous key. Tom Satterthwaite's brawny back completely shielded him during the process, and closing the door without a sound he locked it on the outside.

Ducking low as he passed the window again, he regained the stone passage, and as he did so the storm broke.

"In the King's name!" shouted Mr. Duckworthy, seizing the heavy poker and flinging back his chair. "As a justice of the peace, I order you to arrest these men! They are spies of the Pretender!"

There was a crash of broken glass as Ned "Neitherside" jumped up and overturned the table to make a barrier between himself and the expected rush, but the inner door opened suddenly before he could speak, and Dick

Ormerod appeared, levelling a cocked pistol in each hand.

“The first of you who stirs a foot dies the death!” he cried, adding in French, which both his companions spoke perfectly: “The nags are saddled. I have secured the other door, and will keep this one until you are mounted! *Vite, vite!*”

Even the landlord, stout Cumberland wrestler that he was, recoiled at the sight of those bright steel barrels, which seemed to threaten every man at once, and as Josiah Wakefield darted out Ned “Neitherside” produced his own weapons and backed more slowly towards the inner door.

“I fear me, landlord,” he laughed, yet with a very stern ring in the mockery of his voice, “I fear me you must look to ‘Master Justice Shallow’ there for our reckoning, or else wait until we are this way again! Good night, gentlemen all!” And having reached the door, the key of which was luckily upon the passage side, he turned it, making prisoners of them all.

“Dick lad, I love thee!” he cried, as they ran into the yard, meeting Wakefield leading

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out the horses. And swinging up into their saddles they galloped past the lighted window of the roadside inn, hearing the landlord's mighty roar as he flung himself against the stout oak panel.

“We must ride for it now!” said Ned Nethersole sternly. “You can laugh later, Wakefield. We have little enough start as it is in this land of dark nights and stone walls!”

CHAPTER VIII

AT ARMSTRONG'S SMITHY

“PLAGUE take this fog!” growled Wakefield. “We must have missed the Edinburgh road, for I’ll swear the city lies somewhere in that direction.”

There was a mist rolling in from the Forth. It crept like a cold grey blanket across the stubble fields, and the night was very dark.

Josiah Wakefield’s oily smile had given place to a frown of increasing doubt for the past three miles, and now he reined in his jaded horse and peered about him over the upturned collar of his cloak.

“I thought I caught the glimmer of a light some way ahead while you were speaking, but it was over here,” said Dick.

“How? Where? Egad, I see it too!” cried Wakefield. “Stay where you are until I reconnoitre, and if you hear me whistle you will know the coast is clear.”

They had been a week upon their journey,

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and the recollection of it was like a page from some strange romance to Dick Ormerod.

To a high-spirited boy, who had never been more than twenty miles from his own home, that long ride to Carlisle, with the narrow escape at Penrith, and afterwards through the beautiful Lowland country which had brought them at last to the neighbourhood of Edinburgh, had been a great adventure.

It was all like a glorious dream, and the young rebel's heart quickened with every mile that brought him nearer to the meeting with his hero.

Of news they had obtained little, and none to be depended upon, for the wildest rumours were afloat, and sunset had found them in the Pentland Hills, where somehow the wary Wakefield's topographical knowledge seemed to have failed him.

The fog soon swallowed up the sound of the spy's hoofs, and for five minutes the two friends sat without speaking in the narrow road, bordered by loose stone dykes, until Nethersole pressed the mare closer to the boy's side.

“Well, Dick lad, we're getting to the end of our journey. Are you still as keenly set on

this venture?" said the highwayman in a bantering voice.

"Why, yes, Mr. Nethersole!" came the surprised reply. "Surely you have no doubt on that score—nor yet of His Highness's success?"

"My dear Richard, for yourself I have not the slightest doubt in the world!" laughed his companion. "As for that second question, everything is still in the air, and, as I have told you twenty times already, I intend to see things with my own eyes before I take so serious a plunge. Very likely I may capitulate at once to Prince Charlie's smile, which friend Wakefield assures us is so captivating. On the other hand, I claim the right with your brother Humphrey to choose for myself according to my judgment, until which time I remain Ned 'Netherside,' as the squire christened me."

Dick Ormerod laughed, a gay, confident laugh.

"I am well content, Mr. Nethersole, to leave all that to chance," he said. "A just cause *must* conquer, and the Prince will know how to reward his faithful followers."

"To say truth, Richard Ormerod, I grow a little weary when you quote Wakefield's words at

every opportunity," said the highwayman. " His mouth is full of stock phrases about princely generosity and divine right of kings. I don't want to damp your ardour, but both you and I may be very disappointed when we see this young gentleman face to face."

" But I thought you liked Mr. Wakefield? " said Dick in an aggrieved tone. " I know he has a tremendous opinion of you."

" Very flattering to my vanity, Dick! " laughed the highwayman, making an unseen grimace in the darkness. " But there goes his whistle, which means we are to proceed." And walking their horses along the road, they soon encountered Mr. Wakefield waiting beside a stone building.

" We are in luck's way," he announced in a low voice. " Not only is this a smithy, but I have had some talk with the worthy man himself, who is with us heart and soul. We are close to the city after all, whence his son will be returning presently with the latest intelligence." And taking Dick's roan by the bridle, Wakefield led the way through a large wooden door, which he closed carefully when they were once inside.

It was a long, barn-like interior, with two anvils on the earthen floor, and as the smith had just relit his furnace and was blowing it into a blaze a cheery glow showed them heaps of rusty iron lying about, the cobwebs festooning the low rafters, and something that attracted Ned Nethersole's observant eye—a rickety stairway leading to a room overhead.

“Now, friend,” said the highwayman, as the man continued to work his bellows that he might take shrewd stock of his belated customers, “I have always found that there are two people in this world who’ve got all the news there is in it—a blacksmith and a barber. How do things shape themselves in these parts?”

“Ill for King George, I’m thinkin’,” replied the man with a curt laugh.

“How? Do you mean there has been an engagement—a battle?” demanded Nethersole.

“Nae, there’s been nae battle, nor like to be one—unless the Redcoats can fecht as well as they rin!” grinned the blacksmith. “Had ye been here aboot three o’clock this afternoon ye’d hae seen a braw race ’twixt Gardiner’s and Hamilton’s Dragoons, when they fell back on the city.”

“But, man alive, why should they run?”

exclaimed his listener incredulously. "It was surely some military movement you witnessed?"

"Oh, aye, 'twas a military movement a'recht, and I stood in yin door and laughed sae hearty that my sides ache now at the verra thought of it. Why did they run frae Colt-Brig, ye ask? 'Twas the sight of a bunch of Hieland bonnets over the hill-top here that stirred them better than any drum, and I'd no be surprised if they hanna stoppit yet! But here comes my boy Johnny. Now we shall hear how it goes wi' Auld Reekie. You can speak up, laddie, for these gentlemen are out for the Good Cause."

The story poured forth in broad Scotch like a highland stream in spate, and the gist of it was that the Lord Provost had very artfully countered every scheme for the city's defence, being a Jacobite at heart; that the volunteers' arms were being deposited in the Castle lest the enemy should get them, thus leaving the would-be defenders helpless; and that Edinburgh would be handed over to the Prince without a blow.

"The Town Guard's drunk, the Dragoons are awa' to Dunbar, and the Council's sitting at Mrs. Clark's tavern," gibbered Johnny Armstrong in high glee, to the great joy of all his listeners save

Ned Nethersole, who hid the gloom that came into his face under pretence of lighting a pipe at the fire.

When he turned round to them he was smiling again, and listened with an approving nod of his red head as the lad ran off a list of the Young Pretender's forces in reply to Wakefield's question.

“ The Camerons are wi' him, and the Stewarts o' Appin; the MacDonalds of Glengarry, an' Keppoch, an' Glencoe; then there's Macgregors, an' Athol men, an' Robertsons—and all the clans comin' out o' the hills as fast as their braw legs can carry them—hech! an' they say in Edinboro' that the Prince had only seven gentlemen when he landed! ”

“ If you still harbour any doubts, Nethersole, they should surely take wings and fly—like German George's Dragoons! ” laughed Josiah Wakefield, a little maliciously.

The two had been quite good friends during the journey, and the gentleman highwayman had played his cards with great skill, realizing from the start that the Pretender's agent loved the sound of his own voice, and so letting him do most of the talking.

A LOYAL YOUNG REBEL

For the past two days, however, Nethersole had caught the man's eyes fixed upon him several times with a curious expression of doubt almost amounting to suspicion, and he had made up his mind that the time was close at hand when it would be wise to remove himself out of possible danger, at any rate for a while.

"I am with you, Wakefield," he smiled. "Things seem to be running well, and a few days should decide it all. But heigh-ho!" Here he gave a prodigious yawn. "I am grown so wondrous drowsy on a sudden that I caught myself nodding in the saddle."

He pulled out his watch as he spoke and made a surprised face.

"Egad, 'tis one o'clock in the morning! Wakefield, you dog, I like your company better than your hours! Master Smith here has twelve shoes to make and fix, and I'm for a corner where a man may roll himself in his cloak and sleep until the work be done."

"Ye'll find straw in the loft overhead," said the blacksmith, pointing to the rickety stairs, "and ye'll all three of ye be in better fettle to kiss the Prince's hand for a couple of hours' rest. You're no likely to be disturbit by ony of the

AT ARMSTRONG'S SMITHY

Elector's men, but if so happen there should be danger we'll warn you time eneuch."

After carefully removing the long pistols from their holsters the trio followed the young blacksmith into the loft, where they found a heap of straw in one corner, and in spite of his eagerness Dick was sound asleep the moment he lay down.

Not so Mr. Edward Nethersole, in spite of the well-simulated snores that mingled with Wakefield's own, for the highwayman had never been wider awake in his life.

He lay there listening to the sounds that came up from below—the subdued roar of the bellows, the curious, muffled, musical beat of the hammer on the glowing iron that is like no other sound in the world, and the sizzle of the hot shoe placed in position, followed by the pungent whiff of burnt horn that filtered up through the nicks in the floorboards.

He heard the clang of pincers thrown down on the earthen floor; the tapping home of the nails. He knew which horse was being shod, and when the smith had finished with his own mare. And all the time he listened his brain was very busy.

A LOYAL YOUNG REBEL

Apart from any doubts that might be growing in Wakefield's mind, the gentleman highwayman had discovered the previous day that his purse was getting empty and must be replenished, and to do that it would be necessary to part company with Dick Ormerod for a time.

But before he had made any definite plan he became aware of another sound, which his well-trained ear told him was the shuffle of many feet upon the road outside.

He had almost raised himself, the better to listen, when the sounds suddenly ceased and a single tap came upon the smithy door, followed by a cry from the boy Johnny and a stern, strange voice which said: "Ye work late, smith—or, rather, early. Whose are these horses?"

"Since from your plaid ye be a Cameron, sir, there can be no harm in my tellin' ye," said the blacksmith. "They belong to three gentlemen riding to join the Prince, and they have come far."

"How far?"

"'Tis more than I can answer, but yin red roan was last shod in Lancashire, the grey gelding had one Westmorland and two Cumberland shoes,

AT ARMSTRONG'S SMITHY

and as for that sonsie brown mare, she had but a couple on when she came, and I know not the smith's work," replied Armstrong, with true pride in the knowledge of his craft.

"And where are they now?"

"The shoes, sir?"

"No, you fool, the riders?"

Armstrong must have pointed to the floor above, for the new-comer said in a tone of command: "Fetch them down. Tell them Donald Cameron of Lochiel sends his compliments and is in some haste."

Mr. Edward Nethersole laid his cheek in the crook of his arm and began to snore lustily.

Wakefield gave a cry of delight as the smith thrust his head and shoulders into the loft and delivered the message with which he had been charged.

"Wake our friend, Dick!" he said over his shoulder. "Here is the best news in the world!" And descending into the smithy the Prince's emissary presented his credentials to the Highland officer who made such a martial figure there, with a long feather in his bonnet and the lights glinting on the hilt of his claymore and the polished butts of his steel pistols.

A LOYAL YOUNG REBEL

But it was in vain that Dick shook the sleeper. Ned Nethersole only rolled himself over on to the other side with an angry growl and another deep snore, and when Wakefield's voice came up from below, calling "Come hither, Dick!" the boy, burning with a wild desire to be in the forefront of things, reluctantly abandoned his friend to his slumbers and obeyed the call, crying out in a despairing voice: "I cannot rouse him!"

"No matter," said Mr. Wakefield. "Armstrong will bid him join us in Edinburgh, which this gentleman's followers are about to capture. This is Master Richard Ormerod, sir, the scion of a very old Cheshire family, and I can answer for it that his heart is in the right place. Dick, let me present you to the chief of the Clan Cameron."

Lochiel looked at the bright black eyes and flaming cheeks of the young rebel.

"If we are lucky enough to meet with a thousand lads of your spirit, young gentleman," he said with a very pleasant smile, "the throne is as good as won. If the pair of ye care to accompany us on foot you shall see what Hieland men can do, and you shall march with a young

AT ARMSTRONG'S SMITHY

kinsman of mine who is much of an age with yourself."

"A thousand thanks, sir!" exclaimed Dick. "But what about Mr. Nethersole?" And he looked at Wakefield.

"We have an old Scottish proverb anent letting sleeping dogs lie," said Lochiel. "Armstrong here will see to it that your friend joins us to-morrow and brings the nags with him."

CHAPTER IX

“CHARLIE IS MY DARLING!”

DURING the brief conversation Dick had been conscious that somebody was fidgeting impatiently outside the half-open door. Once, even, a bonneted head had peered in for a moment and been as hastily withdrawn, but as Lochiel gave a low whistle the owner of the head instantly presented himself and their eyes met.

Dick felt his own plain blue riding suit and high, crinkly boots completely eclipsed by the picturesque garb of the young Highlander, whose kilt and plaid of the red Cameron tartan, all made in one piece, was secured on the shoulder by a large brooch set with some yellow stones that flashed in the dull light from the forge.

His knees were bare, his shoes of soft deerskin were silver buckled, and at his back was slung a round Highland target.

“Esmé,” said Lochiel, “you will take Mr. Ormerod here under your wing. He has ridden

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a long way to join us, and he has come at the right moment.”

The two lads bowed courteously, each keenly criticizing the other’s appearance, and both liking what they saw.

“ You carry a good sword at your side, Mr. Ormerod,” said Esmé Cameron. “ I trust you can use it well? ”

“ I shall not use it ill, Mr. Cameron, for it was my father’s! ” replied Dick proudly, as they stepped out of the building. “ Is His Highness with us? ”

“ Nay, he remains at Grey’s Mill until we have cleared the way for him,” replied his new acquaintance. “ But there goes the word! ”

A low whisper in Gaelic was followed by the soft tramp of those deerskin brogues, and, falling into step with the young Highlander, Dick Ormerod began another stage on his rebellious road.

Swiftly and silently that adventurous band of eight hundred clansmen, with their chief, and the traitor Murray of Broughton at their head, made a wide detour round the south of the doomed city, taking care to keep out of range of the guns of the Castle perched high above them, and between

four and five o'clock in the morning they crept up to the Netherbow Port on Edinburgh's eastern side, which, like all the eight principal gates, was closed.

Treason and incapacity had done their work, and the City Guard of one hundred and twenty men were all that were left on duty. Of these, six privates were on guard at the Netherbow. The keeper of the Port had gone to bed, worn out by two sleepless nights, and the charge of the post was committed to his servant.

There was no challenge as the Camerons formed up outside the gate, and no attempt to open it as they had half hoped; but a circumstance happened which made the entry easy.

Two deputations had been sent to the Pretender's headquarters during the night, and the coach that had conveyed the second of these drove up empty.

“Do you hear that?” whispered Dick, as the rumble of the wheels came to a stand within the barrier. “Is it a cannon, think you?”

Esmé Cameron laid a warning hand on his arm, and they listened intently. An altercation was in progress between the driver of the coach, who wished to take his jaded horses to their

stables in the Canongate without, and the senior private, who bade him wait until morning.

Then another voice joined in, as also the jangling of keys.

“I hae my orders to pass this man through. I ken him weel,” said the new-comer.

“Oh, well, if you have an order you must answer for it,” said the private. “You have the keys of the Port, and I have nothing to say.”

A whisper ran like magic among that silent band in the darkness. The key turned in the lock, the great door opened with a creak of its hinges, and as the coach drove out the Camerons surged in.

One private of the Town Guard flung his musket forward, but Dick wrenched it from his hand in a trice, and dealt him so sound a tap on the nose with the butt end that the man reeled against the wall.

“Yours is the honour of having shed the only blood at the capture of Edinburgh, Master Ormerod,” smiled Lochiel. And giving a quick command in Gaelic, the Highlanders glided after him to secure the other gates, which done they mustered in perfect order in the Parliament Close before the stroke of five.

“Stay you here with our friends, Dick,” said Wakefield, “and I will join you before the Prince makes his entry.” And the spy went away on some mysterious business of his own.

Meanwhile, at the smithy, when the last shoe had been fixed, Armstrong mounted the creaking stair again with a lantern, to find the sleeper sitting up in the straw, covering him with a pistol.

“Haud ye'r hand, mon!” said the blacksmith, hurriedly delivering his message, which brought the rogue to his feet with a pretended cry of astonishment and dismay.

“Gone?” he exclaimed, looking at the empty nests in the straw. “Egad, 'twas a paltry trick for which they shall answer. Quick, good fellow, which way have they taken?” And with all haste he examined the priming of his pistols, tightened Bright Eyes' girth, and sprang into his saddle.

“Best leave the other horses where they be till morn, ye'll mak' clatter eneuch as it is for Lochiel's liking,” warned the smith. “Yin's the Edinboro' road; but should ye change your mind and join the Prince instead, tak' the first turning on your bridle arm, an' guid luck to ye, sir!”

Ned Nethersole nodded, and rode away into

the darkness, smiling at the thought that he had outwitted both spy and blacksmith, and that neither Lochiel nor the Pretender would see him that night if he had any say in the matter.

“Gad’s life! ” he breathed, as he turned his back on the distant city and struck westward, letting the mare take her own pace. “Here we are in the very hub of trouble, and I no nearer to saving that headstrong boy from his folly! The mischief is done, alack, since Wakefield gave me no loophole on the road up to prove him the villain and the cur I know him to be, and now the Pretender will win Dick, heart and soul, at their first meeting. I ought to have pistolled the fellow the night I relieved him of Tom Leigh’s guineas! ”

Dick’s eyes sparkled as he and his new friend stood there waiting for the grey dawn to break, and when the sun rose, gilding the tall shaft of the old Market Cross surmounted by its unicorn, he eagerly examined the Highlanders, who had kept their ranks in obedience to Lochiel’s command instead of spreading themselves through the town.

They were fine mountaineers and worthy of the chief who led them, but they showed signs

of the long marches they had made. Their deer-skin brogues were worn very thin, and while every man carried a broadsword, target and *skene dhu*, or black knife, a good many of them had no muskets.

They were soon surrounded by a gaping crowd, but the bronzed fellows in their ragged red tartans kept their ranks and refused the spirits that were offered them on all sides, by the orders of their leader, who had impressed them with the fact that they must pay for everything they took, and had promised each man two shillings to spend on much-needed necessaries when they should be dismissed parade.

“ Well, Mr. Ormerod, what do you think of us? ” said Esmé with an expectant gleam in his dark eyes.

“ They are indeed men to be proud of! ” exclaimed Dick enthusiastically, looking continually over his shoulder for Mr. Nethersole, as he watched the ever-increasing crowd of spectators and the windows filling with excited faces.

Shortly after noon the city heralds arrived with their trumpeters, and while they read the Proclamations of King James VIII and those of the Prince Regent, as the Young Pretender styled

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himself, the Clan Cameron surrounded the Cross in three ranks, and the beautiful Mrs. Murray of Broughton sat on horseback, a drawn sword in her hand, distributing the White Cockade.

Ladies waved their handkerchiefs from the windows, the mob cheered wildly, as mobs will, the pipes skirled, and Dick was vainly trying to catch the heralds' words amid the noise when Wakefield touched him on the shoulder.

“Quick! follow me,” he whispered. “The Prince is coming!” And they started off at a run, through the Netherbow and along the quaint old Canongate, towards the Palace of Holyrood.

The distant cheers grew louder and louder, mingling with the skirl of bagpipes, and presently they saw the head of the procession approaching through the crowd.

It was a wonderful feast of enthusiasm and moving colour as it wound down the slope, but the boy had eyes only for the tall, graceful figure on the bay brown gelding, bowing and smiling between the Duke of Perth and Lord Elcho; the figure in the Stuart tartan and red velvet breeches, with the gold-laced velvet bonnet set on his fair periwig, and the blue ribbon of St. Andrew across his breast.

It was "Bonnie Prince Charlie" at last, and Dick shouted lustily with the others who crowded about their hero, kissing his boots and showering blessings on his head.

He scarcely realized that Mr. Wakefield was dragging him towards the doorway until a solitary cannon-ball from the Castle struck James the Fifth's Tower, bringing a shower of rubbish down into the courtyard, but doing no further injury.

"What, is old General Guest waking up at last?" laughed the Prince, dismounting. "Ha, Wakefield, and who is this young gentleman you are presenting to us?"

"Master Richard Ormerod from Cheshire," said the secret agent, as Dick fell on one knee and kissed the proffered hand. "He has dared much to join the good cause, and though young in years, Your Royal Highness will not find a better horseman, a surer shot, nor a heart more loyal among all your adherents. Moreover, he speaks French like a native."

"Egad, Mr. Ormerod, my Lord George Murray seeks just such a one for an aide-de-camp!" cried the Prince, his blue eyes sparkling with more than ordinary interest. "And to the

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list of your accomplishments do you add that of dancing, sir? ”

Dick blushed and bowed, unable to find his tongue.

“ Then shall you foot it at the ball we give to-night, and Murray shall confirm the appointment.”

“ For which I humbly thank Your Royal Highness, since Richard is my nephew, and I can answer for all friend Wakefield has told you! ” said a voice behind him which made Dick turn, to see Uncle Tom Leigh standing there with Peggy and Joan.

“ *Ma foi!* If Cheshire produces such paladins and such pretty maids the sooner we pay it a visit the better! ” laughed Charles Edward with the most graceful of bows, and following James Hepburn of Keith, who waved the sword he had drawn in the rising of 1715, the Young Chevalier entered the palace of his ancestors.

CHAPTER X

A LETTER FROM THE NORTH

IT was a snug room—that one in which the portrait of Dick's father hung, with the reflection of the logs shining up on to the stern, handsome face; but Mrs. Ormerod rose with a heavy sigh from the fire over which she had been seated, and went to the window.

The park without was covered with snow, and the red sun was sinking sullenly through a sky of leaden grey.

From somewhere in the recesses of the bare November woods the report of a fowling-piece came on the frosty air, and she shivered.

It did not need the sound to carry her thoughts to that absent boy of hers, for they had been with him from the moment his departure had been discovered.

Anxiety had robbed the sweet face of its colour, and there were deep lines in it which ought not to have been there.

Her one fear was for Dick's welfare; her one longing to hear tidings of him.

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Her tambour frame stood neglected by the fireside. She had no heart to put a stitch into it, and she was turning away from the cheerless prospect with another heavy sigh of disappointment when she spied a figure coming up the avenue.

The new-comer picked his way in the shadow of the trees, something in the stealthiness of his movements attracting her attention, for every now and then he would pause and peer about him, and then break almost into a run, only to pause again.

“Surely that is Brewster the poacher, with his limping foot? What can he want here? I have never known him come to the Hall in daylight!” she thought as he drew nearer, and as she watched the man in his ragged coat the door behind her opened softly, to admit Humphrey’s head.

“Where are the girls, mother?” he said. “You are too much alone these days, and always brooding over Dick’s absence.”

“Ah, my dear boy, some day you may understand—but come here,” Mrs. Ormerod made answer.

He was beside her in a moment, his strong

arm twining affectionately round her; and the poacher, when he saw the two figures against the glow of the firelight, left the shelter of the trees and limped boldly forward.

Humphrey was equally surprised at Brewster's approach, but, understanding the wave of his fist which followed the respectful salute the poacher gave, he ran to the hall porch.

Brewster, who was fumbling in his pocket, drew out a sealed packet which he disengaged from a medley of rabbit snares.

“ This was left at T’ Load of Hay, Maister Humphrey,” he said, lowering his voice. “ They bade me bring it to your mither, and the postboy told ’em the Pretender’s men are at Carlisle, where t’castle be surrendered wi’ scarce a shot fired! ”

Humphrey snatched it, recognizing his brother’s schoolboy scrawl, and saw that, although the packet bore signs of having passed through many hands, the seals were unbroken.

“ Here, Sam,” he said, groping under the flap of his waistcoat and producing a coin, “ this for your trouble, and when you go round to the kitchen tell them they’re to give you some ale.”

“ Thank you kindly, but indeed I want nowt

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for bringing you news of Maister Richard," grinned the poacher in a whisper.

"What do you mean, Sam?" demanded Humphrey, lowering his voice and looking at the seals again to reassure himself.

"Nay, maister," he laughed, "I can neither read nor write, but I can see as well in t'dark as most men—better'n some—an' I know weer t'young spark went an' who he went wi'. If mistress be minded to send an answer to that there letter I can carry it." And without waiting for any further parley he limped away.

Humphrey cleared the frown from his brow with an effort as he heard his mother's footstep, and, meeting her at the door of the room, pushed her gently back and held the packet out.

"News at last, dear!" he cried in a husky voice. "I will bid them bring candles. Ah, here they are!" And as he led his mother to her chair the corporal placed two silver sticks on the table.

"Bid the young ladies come here, Mobberley," said Mrs. Ormerod in a strained voice, struggling to hide her emotion as she held the packet tightly to her breast with both her mitened hands.

The tap of the major's wooden leg was heard approaching, and the moment he stumped into the room he saw from his sister-in-law's flushed face that something unusual had happened.

"Eh? God bless my soul! What's the matter now, Mary?" he snapped, bringing up in front of the fireplace.

"A letter at last, Egerton. Richard has written!" she cried.

"Oh, and about time!" said the major, but even his eyes shone with a sudden light that belied the apparent sternness of his words.

In another moment Lucy and Margery and Ruth, their cheeks glowing from recent skating on the ice, tripped in, and Humphrey closed the door.

"We have heard from your brother!" said Mrs. Ormerod in a trembling voice of deep thankfulness, to which the three girls made answer with a joyful "Oh, mamma!" and running forward knelt beside her.

"Well, Mary, let's hear what the young monkey has to say for himself," grunted the major. And surely never were the contents of a letter awaited with keener eagerness than were

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those of that long-delayed effusion from the absent rebel.

“Dearest Mother,” it began, and there were several pages of it, which, since they contained an account of stirring things by an actual participant, we will give just as Dick wrote them, transcribed from the time-yellowed sheets which are still treasured in the family as carefully as the happy mother preserved them during her own long lifetime :

First of all I will tell you that I am in the best of health and spirits, and am writing this in the quarters of Lord George Murray, who has taken me as one of his aides-de-camp. Uncle Tom Leigh and the girls are living in a house in what they call the Canongate, which is outside the city wall, and I have danced with my cousins at every ball His Highness has given in the picture gallery at Holyrood Palace.

“Stap my vitals, but that scoundrel Tom Leigh and I shall have a reckoning if they don’t hang him beforehand!” exclaimed Uncle Egerton, turning red as a turkey cock.

How dearly do I wish that you could see

the Prince, mother! Everything Mr. Wakefield told me about him was perfectly true. He is tall and very handsome, with the brightest blue eyes, and a flaxen periwig worn over his own hair. Anything more engaging than his smile it is not possible to imagine, and he wins all hearts wherever he goes.

“Oh, mamma!” chorused the girls.

“Be quiet and let your mother proceed!” said Uncle Egerton sharply.

As a rule he appears in the Highland dress, with a silver-hilted broadsword, and on the march he carries a round target on his back like all the other clansmen.

“I hope he’ll carry it when he marches to Tower Hill!” interrupted the major.

“Oh, Uncle Egerton!” expostulated Lucy.

“I told you not to interrupt. Let your mother get on. Surely the letter’s not all about that fellow?”

Mrs. Ormerod wiped the glad tears from her eyes and continued:

Doubtless you will have heard by this time how we marched from Duddingstone outside Edinburgh to a place called Preston,

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where there are large salt works, and where Sir John Cope was drawn up to meet us.

It was four o'clock in the morning when we started in a single column, three abreast, and you should have heard the cheer we gave when His Highness drew his broadsword and cried : “ Gentlemen, I have flung away the scabbard ! ”

“ A very soldierly proceeding, truly ! Probably he found it too heavy, target and all ! ” snorted the major ; but Mrs. Ormerod went on :

On the way Lord George pointed out Carberry Hill, more than two miles on our right, where he told me Mary Queen of Scots had surrendered.

After a while Lord George, who knew the ground well, left the post road and led us through the fields for half an hour on to some high land, whence, when the rest of our men had come up, we marched towards a village called Tranent, where we came in full view of the enemy on the lower ground. We could see them on the plain below us, and very brave they looked in their red coats, as Sir John Cope changed his position ; but

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we were five thousand men and the enemy not much more than half that number.

We shouted and they shouted, and it was funny to see the little red companies moving about in the bright sunshine as though they were on parade. They looked just like those wooden soldiers Humphrey and I used to play with.

The major snorted and took snuff violently, and Mrs. Ormerod wiped her eyes again.

Everybody here laughs at Johnnie Cope, as they call him, now that it is all over; but I think they are wrong, for he had chosen his post with a marsh in front of it, and it was not his fault if his troops ran.

Lord George sent Colonel Ker to reconnoitre, which he did on a little white pony, very coolly.

About five o'clock our troops divided into two parties, as though we were going to surround the enemy, which made Cope alter his position again.

I counted their guns—six small mortars and six gallopers. We had only one cannon, which the Highlanders call the “Musket’s Mother.” It is a foolish affair, more a

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hindrance than a help, but they are very proud of it, so we drag it along in a cart drawn by ponies.

They fired on some of our men who had been posted in the churchyard at Tranent by an interfering Irishman named O'Sullivan, for whom His Royal Highness has a greater regard than has Lord George, who rated him soundly in my hearing.

If we are not soon in London it will not be the German King's troops who will stop us, nor will it be my general's fault, but because the Irish officers pull against the rest, and there is great jealousy among the Highland chieftains.

When the light faded we bivouacked where we stood on the stubble, the Prince himself in a field of peas, with a sheaf of them for a pillow. I shall never forget that night, which turned dark and cold, and I lay watching the enemy's camp-fires, every now and then their Dragoon patrols passing and re-passing in front of them, and no sound but the melancholy cry of the curlews in the marsh. They call them "whaups" here.

We on our side were forbidden to show a light, and I was just falling asleep when young Mr. Anderson of Whitborough came to where we lay, giving the word as I jumped up and he heard me cock my pistol.

Humphrey Ormerod's eyes grew larger as he listened. So far he had kept silence, but the working of his face showed how he hung on every sentence.

Mr. Anderson said he must speak with my lord at once, and when I had roused him we listened to news that was indeed important. Our visitor knew the country well, and had suddenly remembered a path through the swampy ground by which we could cross it—he had shot snipe there; and Lord George thought so highly of the news that he carried him off to the Prince, who sent for Mr. Cameron of Lochiel and some of the other chiefs, who all agreed that no time must be lost.

Meanwhile Lord George Murray dispatched me to bring in the Atholl Brigade, which had been left in reserve beyond Tranent village, which would be about two

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o'clock in the morning, and when I returned with them we found everything ready for an immediate advance.

"Oh!" cried the three girls.

"If you interrupt again I shall ask your mother to send you to bed!" said Uncle Egerton severely. "Go on, Mary!"

I wish I were at home to tell you all about everything with my own lips.

"I wish you were, you young rebel!" exclaimed the major.

But at three o'clock the Clan Macdonald were guided through the swamp by Mr. Anderson, and we followed a little later.

I was very glad when we had got through, because the path was narrow, and some of the men who stepped off it got up to their kilts in the bog.

There is a rumour which may reach you that the Prince drew his sword and said to us: "Follow me, gentlemen, and by the blessing of God I will make you a free and happy people!" But that is not true, because in the first place it was dark, and not a word was spoken for fear of alarming the enemy, and it was never intended that he

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should lead us at all, his life being far too precious.

“ Precious ! ” almost shouted Uncle Egerton.
“ A precious rascal ! ”

Margery and Lucy looked at him as much as to say : “ Who is interrupting now ? ” and the major subsided, leaning forward with his hands on the table and breathing quickly as Mrs. Ormerod began the third sheet of the letter :

What he did was to leap a ditch we encountered and fall on his knees, which my brother aide-de-camp, the Chevalier Johnstone, who helped him up, told me about afterwards ; and by the time we ourselves had crossed the same ditch by a narrow plank bridge the light was coming, and only the mist to hide us from Cope’s sentinels.

So Lord George whispered : “ Face to the left ! ” and as the word was passed along, our first line moved forward on its knees, crouching so low that the Dragoons must have mistaken them for a hedge until we had gained our position, when they fired their pistols and galloped back.

They were fine-looking fellows, with green cuffs and quarter cloths, and belonged to

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Colonel Gardiner's Regiment, whose own house, strange to say, was in their rear.

The poor gentleman had little cause to be proud of his men, though I have been told it was his own fault, since he paid more regard to their souls than the state of their discipline.

“Stuff and nonsense!” thundered the major, in a voice that made them all jump. “Does this boy presume to criticize a colonel of dragoons?”

“Nay, Egerton, he does not repeat what others have told him,” said Mrs. Ormerod, taking up the cudgels for the absent one, whose opinion of the unfortunate Colonel Gardiner was not very far wrong after all.

It was a fine sight as the sun rose clearly in a blue sky, and while we were getting into position I saw through my spy-glass the sea in the distance and the sailors of two English ships climbing to the mastheads to watch us.

At our end of the line were the Camerons and the Stuarts of Appin, with Glencairn's men, and some of the Macgregors, and in front of us we had Cope's artillery, guarded by some men with yellow facings on one flank and Gardiner's Dragoons on the other;

but what there was beyond that I do not know, though I have heard since that there were four regiments of foot drawn up and Hamilton's Dragoons on their flank. But we had not long to look about us, for the muskets began to pop on both sides as the skirmishers opened fire, and then a curious silence fell, when all the Highlanders took off their bonnets and looked up into the blue sky. I think they were praying for victory. It was a short prayer, though, for a cannon went off and the ball whizzed past much closer than I cared about. Another—and another—I counted five—and then we got the word.

Mrs. Ormerod's face turned very pale and the paper crackled in her trembling hands, but she struggled bravely and swallowed back her tears.

I drew my sword—you know whose it was, mother!—and the cheer which the enemy gave was drowned by a terrific yell from our men.

Some of the Dragoons moved forward, but after some of them had fired their pistols the squadron wheeled round, and I am glad Uncle Egerton was not there to see it, for

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they galloped off like the cowards they were. “ Go on, go on ! ” cried the major hoarsely.

The guard on the guns also shook and ran, leaving one brave officer alone with the battery, and then we were through the guns and the whole of Cope’s army was flying in confusion. Had I not witnessed it with my own eyes I could not have thought such a thing possible ; but the Highlanders are terrible in their wrath, and the field was strewn with heads and arms, which made one sick to see—until Lochiel and the Duke of Perth stopped the slaughter.

Lucy dropped forward in a dead faint, but no one took any notice of her.

I saw Colonel Gardiner fall from his black horse near some thorn-trees, after trying to get his men to face us, but was too late to save him. They say he was cut down by a scythe blade, and the poor gentleman has since died ; but the whole affair was over in a few minutes, and save the Dragoons and less than two hundred of the infantry who escaped, the whole of King George’s army was taken prisoners, in spite of the efforts of their officers, who were very brave.

The Prince slept at Pinkie Castle that night, and with the pipers playing “The King Shall Enjoy His Own Again,” we march our prisoners through Edinburgh next day, with seven pairs of colours and all their baggage and military chest.

It seems like a dream, although it is scarce a week since all this happened. It may be some time before I can send this letter safely, but Mr. Nethersole, whom I am expecting every day, will take charge of it when opportunity occurs, and I find I have taken up so much space with the story of my first fight that I am almost at the end of the paper.

“What did I say about Mr. Ned ‘Neitherside’?” cried the major triumphantly.

In my next I will tell you about my new friend, Esmé Cameron, who is of my own age and as brave as a lion. But perhaps before then I shall see you all. I wonder how you will like me in Highland dress! The little piece of cloth I send with this is the Athol, or hunting tartan, which Lord George has given me permission to wear.

God bless you all. I know you have

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forgiven me, dear mother, in your heart of hearts, and we shall be, oh, so happy together
“ when the King enjoys his own again ! ”

Your dutiful son,

Dick.

Humphrey moved quickly forward as Mrs. Ormerod sank back in the chair and closed her eyes, overcome by the strain, but the major stumped from the room without a word, and they heard the library door slam with a bang almost as loud as Colonel Whiteford's cannon that opened the Battle of Prestonpans !

“ Was ever anyone so wretched as I ? ” groaned Humphrey under his breath, as the echo died away. “ The rebels in England ! They have taken Carlisle—and here are we still waiting for orders, with musters and drills that come to nothing, while Dick has been in a real battle already and is getting all the fun ! ”

CHAPTER XI

IN SEARCH OF THE ENEMY

DURING the weeks that followed the Pretender's first victory Dick had seen very little of Mr. Ned Nethersole for obvious reasons.

As the highwayman pointed out to him, if he came too often to Dick's quarters he would certainly be taken for a spy, but they fixed a meeting-place in Edinburgh itself, and it was there that Nethersole discovered Dick had still his mother's letter unposted.

“ You graceless young dog ! ” he said more sternly than the boy had ever heard him speak. “ Give it to me ! ” And he dropped the missive into one of those many mysterious pockets constructed in the lining of his cloak. “ There is a rumour that you march south in a day or so —is it true ? ”

“ Yes, we make a feint against Wade, and dividing into two columns, the army will then strike west, joining again near Carlisle.”

“Then since I am going in that direction upon certain business of my own,” said Nethersole, “it is at Carlisle you may expect to see me.”

“But why will you not stay and join us?” cried Dick. “Mr. Wakefield has only to say one word to the Prince and he would give you a commission in our cavalry, I know!”

Ned Nethersole laughed.

“You do well to call it cavalry, boy!”

“At any rate, if they are few in number they will not run like Cope’s Dragoons!” retorted Dick.

“That we shall see!” smiled the highwayman. “But I shall not join you, Richard—for several reasons. In the first place I have none too much faith in your Bonnie Prince Charlie. ’Tis not enough that all the ladies dote upon him. Such a venture as this needs a wiser head and less bickering and jealousy among the chiefs and officers; while I would not be beholden to Wakefield under any consideration. I would not trust that man the length of this table.”

He left the boy a little solemn and thoughtful, for in his capacity as aide-de-camp to Lord George Murray he had had ample opportunity of realizing that there was truth in what his friend had said.

While he worshipped the very ground on which the handsome young Prince trod, he had also unbounded respect for Murray's judgment, and there was little doubt that Prince Charles Edward leaned far more to the opinions of the rest than to those of the soundest military head in the whole of his army.

Gallant indeed as was the young Chevalier in the early days of the rebellion, his best friends admit that he disliked those who differed from him, and Lord George Murray was not the most tactful of mortals.

The hopes of the little rebel army beat high when Carlisle surrendered after a brief siege, and provisions, ammunition and horses fell into their hands.

About noon on the day after his letter had reached Ormerod Hall, Dick was talking to Esmé Cameron, when Lord George Murray came out of his quarters.

“Mr. Ormerod,” said he, “you know the road to Brampton, whither thirty of my Lord Pitsligo's horse marched at daybreak. Ride there and see if you can procure any information of Wade's movements. Take your own time, but remember our march is ordered for to-morrow at

dawn, and whether we start or no will depend on the news you bring me."

Dick saluted, and was hurrying off with a bright face, but Lord George checked him.

"Most haste is the worst speed," he said. "I have such confidence in your judgment that, if needs be, you may push on beyond Brampton, for intelligence I must have, and if you are taken for a Scotsman you will not get it. Your cloak will cover your Highland garb, but your bonnet will betray you. Change it for a hat, Mr. Ormerod, and have your horse roughed."

Dick was soon in the saddle, and very nearly out of it a dozen times before his roan Quicksilver reached the old town of Brampton, for the roads were three feet deep in snow and it was freezing hard.

The place seemed deserted, for the inhabitants of that ancient place kept within doors.

They had seen all they wanted to see of the Prince and his adherents, the Pretender having lain there for two days while the garrison of Carlisle had been summoned to surrender; but the bunch of horses in front of an inn told the young aide-de-camp where the gentlemen of Pitsligo's troop were disporting themselves, and

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one of them, who was keeping guard, and knew Dick by sight, hailed him as he approached.

“Have you been sent to recall us, young sir?” he cried.

“Nay, I have come for news,” replied Dick, reining up in a cloud of steam.

“Then you have come for something *we* can’t find!” laughed the man. “No intelligence has reached this place, nor is it likely any will, and I pity Wade if he thinks to get troops over yon hills in this weather. But get you inside, laddie, for they brew a punch here that is almost worth the long march we have made from Edinburgh.”

“That may be,” said Dick with a frown. “But my orders are to get in touch with the enemy; not to toast my toes in a snug inglenook, my friend!” And the man stared after him as he passed up the deserted street, the rebuke not lost upon him.

At the far end of the town the patrol bade him halt.

He gave the passwords for the day, which were “Fortune and Carlisle,” and looked with some misgivings at the white stretch of rolling country before the post, backed by the rising hills

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with their snow-clad slopes, through which the road to Newcastle climbed.

Nothing moved, no one seemed abroad in such weather, and the three gentlemen who formed the patrol exchanged glances as he gave Quicksilver his head after a brief questioning.

“It’s good to be young—even in a barren wilderness like this,” said one of them with an indulgent laugh. “The laddie is like to pass the night in a drift to cool his ardour, I’m thinking ! ”

“For all that the boy’s right,” said another of the patrol; “but thank goodness here comes the relief. My feet are frozen to the stirrup-irons ! ”

Dick was already a black speck on the crest of the next rise before the trio turned their horses to ride back to the inn, their places taken by three others, who brought with them an unmistakable odour of that famous punch in the cloud that hung about their heads.

The road being somewhat sheltered from the keen east wind was now less slippery, and Quicksilver’s trot soon covered a mile or more without his rider seeing sign of living creature, when, rounding the end of a bare spinney through which

the blast whistled shrilly, he saw a figure on foot coming towards him at a good round pace.

Making sure that his cloak concealed the tartan jacket and trews he wore, Dick waved his hand to the man, who had stopped at sight of him, and now advanced more warily.

“What’s the news, friend?” called Dick. “Have you seen aught of the Royal Army yet?”

“Nay, master, but I spoke scarce half an hour back with one who has,” replied the man, civilly enough, yet with an inquiring eye which scanned horse and rider furtively. “If your honour does but ride on a matter of two miles there is a lonely ale-house by the roadside, where you will light on Toby Elliot, who is now come from Hexham, where he says Marshal Wade’s men are lying. I know from your speech, sir, that you were born this side of the Border and are not one of those Scotch rebels.”

“I was certainly born as you say!” laughed the young aide-de-camp. “But I must see Toby Elliot without delay.” And he left him, bending his own head before the icy wind.

The bleat of sheep and the barking of a dog somewhere away in the distance increased the loneliness of the scene, and it was with a sigh of

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relief that at last he saw blue smoke from a low chimney and reached the lonely ale-house.

Like the inn at Penrith, it was a grey stone building, with a yard in its rear; and dismounting, he led his panting horse out of the wind under an open shed with a long manger.

A wiry-looking pony that had been ridden hard was tethered at one end, and tying Quicksilver up at the other he removed his pistols, as all cautious travellers did in those days before entering the house by the back door.

At the clatter of his riding-boots and spurs a man's strong voice stopped speaking, and dead hush fell on the low-pitched room in which he found himself.

For a moment his eyes smarted with the wood smoke that filled the place, and he rubbed them as he came round the end of the long settle.

A bent old figure in the corner, a young woman with a frightened face, and a tall, lean man with leather gaiters buttoned above his knees were regarding him suspiciously.

“ You have no cause for alarm, my friends! ” he smiled. “ My business is with Toby Elliot here.” And he looked at the tall fellsman.

“How long will it take me to reach Marshal Wade’s army?” And he threw a note of eagerness into his voice.

“Longer nor the light will last, young sir,” replied the man gravely. “I left the troops at Hexham.”

“What, no nearer?” cried Dick with an impatient gesture. “When will their vanguard reach this place?”

“Not to-night, nor yet to-morrow night,” replied Toby Elliot. “They are spent as it is with the march from Newcastle. The roads are knee-deep already, and there is more snow coming. If you value your own life, young gentleman, ye’ll bide where ye be.”

“Oh, the pity of it!” exclaimed Dick. “And a party of the Pretender’s horse in Brampton yonder that could all be made prisoners by a bold push!”

His assumption of disappointment was so natural that any suspicions the tall fellsman might have entertained vanished in thin air, and as Dick pointed to the man’s empty mug and intimated that he, too, had a thirst, Toby Elliot seated himself again on the settle and poured out his budget of news.

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From him the aide-de-camp learned of the sickness that was among Wade's troops, and how they had had to bring the stragglers in in carts, with much more valuable information, all of which Pitsligo's troopers ought to have gleaned for themselves if they had not set the punch bowl before their duty.

The wintry afternoon was fading, although the reflected light from the snow still filled the room; but Elliot's interesting narrative was suddenly interrupted by the sound of shouting outside, and they went across to the window.

“Look ye here, gran'father!” called the fellsman, as he and Dick each rubbed the frost from one of the little panes. “Yon be the hue and cry after a highwayman, and, by gum, they'll take him if he doesn't know the road!”

They had just been in time to see a galloping figure dip out of sight, followed by a dozen horsemen at least, all yelling lustily as they came over a white ridge against the fiery gleam of a red sunset, and as these passed from view in their turn the fellsman strode to the door and threw it open.

The sharp report of a pistol came on the cutting wind, the roar of voices seemed to re-

double, and the incident was the more exciting that they could now see nothing of what was happening.

“Do you hear that?” laughed the fellsman grimly, as the chorus joined in a mighty whoop. “They’ve got him, and they’ll be along here presently to wet their whistles!”

As he made to shut out the keen wind Dick stepped back towards the fireplace at the end of the room. After all, the capture or escape of a highwayman was no business of his, and all his thoughts were centred on returning to Carlisle with the important news he had obtained.

“I mind the time when the last gibbet was set up on this road,” began the old grandfather; but however gruesome the story he had to tell, it was cut short by the clamour of excited voices and the tramping of many hoofs as the successful pursuers reined up at the ale-house door.

“I told you so!” grinned Toby Elliot. “Here they come, Betty, and you’ll be main busy, my lass, for the next hour and more!”

As a matter of wise precaution Dick Ormerod pulled the spout of his three-cornered hat a little lower on his forehead, and then his blood seemed to freeze in his veins as the door was thrown

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noisily open and a portly figure he remembered only too well stamped across the threshold.

It was his old acquaintance Mr. Duckworthy, J.P., whom he had last encountered at a certain inn near Penrith, and left there under circumstances that came very vividly back to his mind.

“Bring the dog in!” commanded the irate justice, flourishing his hunting crop. “Gad’s life, but we have an old score to settle together, and there shall be no locked doors this time!”

They brought “the dog” in, held in the grip of half a dozen men roaring with laughter as they forced him forward into the room.

Their eyes met for an instant, and well might Dick grasp the end of the settle to steady himself.

The prisoner was Mr. Edward Nethersole, bareheaded, and one of his captors carried a hat in his hand, with a strip of black crêpe pinned to the lining!

Nethersole’s face turned livid in spite of the contemptuous smile that curled his well-shaped mouth, and even when they had forced him down into a rush-bottomed chair and tied his arms behind the ladder-back, the smile was still there.

Then there were shouts of “Mulled ale,

Betty! Stir yourself, wench!" And the room was filled with the uproar of jubilant voices and stamping feet, Dick standing there unnoticed in the general hubbub.

"Od's life, gentlemen!" cried Mr. Duckworthy, "the villain was indeed hoist with his own petard!" And he deposited a leather valise on the table. "Had it been merely my purse of which he eased me, he had got away, but this bag of gold coin proved too heavy even for that stout mare of his. I have ever looked askance at four white legs, but that roadster will I buy once the rogue has been properly hanged."

"Nay, your worship be wrong about the white legs, and the old adage is right after all, since the snowdrifts have cleaned off three of them, and I doubt the fourth will prove to have been painted like the rest," chuckled a horsey-looking man with a face like the setting sun. "You'll not get the brown beauty over-cheap, either, I promise you. I mean to bid for her myself!"

"An' there's summat else you haven't thought of, squire," said another of the posse. "Suppose he's not a gallows-bird after all, but turns out to be one of the Pretender's men raising money for his master?"

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“Don’t talk of rebels!” exclaimed several voices in evident alarm.

“So much the better, Job!” roared Mr. Duckworthy. “A rebel he be from my sure knowledge, and in any case the rope will be his end! ’Tis a pity we can’t hang him twice!”

The others roared with laughter, but Edward Nethersole still smiled; and Dick, unable to bear it any longer, walked out into the yard.

His senses seemed stunned, and clasping a hand to his aching head, he muttered: “Mr. Nethersole a highwayman! Mr. Nethersole to be hanged! Surely the world is turned upside-down!”

For a moment he hardly realized where he was, or why he was there, so sudden had been the shock of the discovery; but now there flashed through his mind that mysterious private business which had often taken his friend away for several days at a time, and the description of the phantom rider who had robbed the earl’s agent at the park gates!

He had ridden a horse with four white feet, and there stood Ned “Neitherside’s” well-known brown, tied to the manger beside his own nag, with unmistakable signs of a painted leg.

A thousand acts of kindness to Humphrey and himself surged up in the boy's memory as Bright Eyes whinnied welcome and looked at him with inquiring eyes.

“Nay,” whispered the lad between his clenched teeth, as he passed his hand down the mare's reeking flanks. “Whatever his misdeeds, thy master shall not hang if I can help it!” And choking back the fierce sob that rose in his throat, Dick Ormerod stepped from the shadow of the shed into the yard of the ale-house, where the last burst of the sinking sun was turning the snow crimson.

Down below, the frost mist had begun to blur the landscape, but close at hand along the road by which he had come from Brampton a group of cloaked horsemen were making their way at a footpace towards the house.

“Pitsligo's fellows, by all that's fortunate!” he exclaimed, running out on to the road and whirling his arms round like the sails of a mill.

He saw they had recognized him and were breaking into a trot, but only waiting to draw his sword and point to the building with a gesture there was no mistaking, he darted back into the

yard, opening his cloak as he reached the back door.

A burst of laughter from Duckworthy's men at their prisoner's expense greeted his ears, and then the laughter suddenly ceased as they saw the Atholl tartan and the naked blade in the doorway!

“Lay down your arms!” Dick shouted, and looking back over his shoulder he addressed his imaginary followers. “This way, lads! Sergeant Macdonald, take your company round to the front of the house and see that none of them escape!”

But the hue and cry were in no mind that their retreat should be so cut off and, seized with a sudden panic, they made a mad rush for the other door.

The first to reach it was Squire Duckworthy, who had snatched up his valise with an oath, and amid cries of “The rebels! The rebels!” the valiant party gained the road before the head of Pitsligo's patrol arrived at the yard gate.

As Dick's sword cut the cords that bound him, Ned Nethersole snatched his hat from the table, and tearing out the crêpe mask, thrust it on to the fire, turning to meet the eyes of his rescuer

gazing steadily at him out of a face that had grown very white again.

“This is neither time nor place for words,” said the highwayman hoarsely. “If I have earned your scorn, Richard, at any rate you have won my thanks. Until you hear all, think as little ill of me as may be, and don’t let your friends pursue those fools if you can prevent it.”

Dick dared not trust his own voice, and, glad of an excuse, turned to the open doorway, where one or two of the patrol were firing their pistols to speed the parting guests who had made such an unceremonious exit.

A few who had left their horses by the door itself had been lucky enough to climb into the saddle and vanish; while the rest, Mr. Duckworthy among them, were already plunging out of sight down the hillside, where the irate justice of the peace spent the greater part of the night in a snowdrift, hugging the gold which he had lost and found again in so remarkable a manner.

The good folk of the ale-house had little cause to regret their exchange of customers, but when Dick went out to the shed in search of his friend of happier days, Mr. Ned “Neitherside” and Bright Eyes had gone!

CHAPTER XII

“ MARCHING ORDERS ! ”

“ **P**LAGUE take the Pretender, and the Duke of Cumberland, and the King’s Ministers ; they’re all a pack of fools, and the world’s out o’ joint.”

Squire Daracotte sat in the parlour of The Load of Hay, in the self-same corner where we first made his acquaintance.

A heavy frown mantled his brow, and he pulled savagely at the long clay pipe which he had just lit.

He had breakfasted on cold beef and beer, as was his usual custom, and the landlord, having replenished the tankard unbidden and replaced it at the squire’s elbow, was in the act of clearing away the plates and dishes.

It was nine o’clock on the 1st December, and it was Sunday morning.

Outside, through the little bull’s-eye panes, the country lay white and frostbound, but within the room the fire blazed and sputtered gaily

enough, to the complete satisfaction of the squire's favourite setter, Puce, who had no fault to find with the world, in spite of her master's ill-humour.

“Stap my vitals, Timothy Brundritt! My patience is at an end if ever man's was,” said Mr. Daracotte, testily. “Four months since our first muster, and here we are still cooling our heels without orders, and nothing done that I can see to stay the rebels' march.”

“Your honour's reet,” nodded the innkeeper; “but if the rogues should come this way, which God forbid, they'll find the Light Horse ready for them. Mebbe Marshal Wade's Army's cut across their track by this time, as we've heard nothing since they reached Preston last Tuesday.”

“Don't talk to me about Wade, the old slow-coach,” growled Mr. Daracotte. “Think you, Brundritt, if he'd been worth his salt the rebels would have taken Carlisle, much less got as far as Preston? But what's become of Sam Brewster, I wonder? I sent him off three days ago on a horse to get news.”

“And he's got it, squire,” laughed the poacher, who had come into the outer room in time to hear the words, bringing a cold chill in

with him. “Manchester’s up for t’ Pretender. I saw his army leave at dawn this morning for Macclesfield, and they’re comin’ this way.”

There had been no mirth in Sam Brewster’s laugh, and his thin, sharp face was more wizened than usual, and blue with the cold. There was a husky rattle of exhaustion in his voice, too, which made Dashing Daracotte hold the tankard out to him.

“Here, wet your whistle, man,” he said ; and the poacher needed no second bidding.

“Which road did they take?” demanded the squire.

“Why, all t’ bridges are brokken down,” replied Brewster. “So t’ Pretender and part of his men are crossing t’ river out Stockport way. His thirteen guns are to come by Gatley, and Kilmarnock’s Horse cross t’ Mersey at Didsbury Ford, and then take t’ road to Altrincham. I know that’s reet, because I heard the orders read out last neet.”

Dashing Daracotte listened with increasing amazement in his face, and getting up, stood in front of the fire with his legs apart.

“Thirteen guns, you say?”

“Ay, and they’ve raised a regiment in Manchester.”

“What?” roared the squire.

“Yes, and they look all reet, I can tell ye, in their blue clothes and plaid sashes, wi’ every man a hanger at his side and a white cockade in his hat. Mr. Francis Townley is their colonel, and Tom Cappoch quartermaster. But mebbe ye’d best let me tell your honour all about it from t’ beginning.”

Dashing Daracotte hauled a great silver watch out of his fob.

“Howd thee din,” he said sternly. “Yes, there’s time enough,” and he made a mental calculation by the aid of his fingers. “What’s the strength of this Scotch rabble?”

“Nearer five thousand than four o’ foot, and about five hundred horsemen,” replied the poacher. “And they’re no rabble, either.”

Dashing Daracotte lifted up his voice and bellowed: “Wilcox, I want you.”

Wilcox was the parson’s son, who had been made a corporal in the newly-raised troop, and he came in promptly at the call, looking very smart and soldierly.

“The muster’s for ten o’clock, Wilcox,” said

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Mr. Daracotte. “Are there any men about the place?”

“Yes, sir, five or six.”

“Then someone must go at once to Newcastle-under-Lyme, well mounted. He is to tell His Royal Highness that we have certain news of the Pretender’s march. His advance guard will be in the village here between eleven and twelve, and if they cross the green it will be over our dead bodies. Send the rest round to bid the others bring their horses to the muster, and the sooner the better.”

As he spoke, he took his sword and belt from the end of the settle, where they hung, and having put them on, seemed more at his ease, while young Wilcox ran off on his errand.

“We were all going to Service at the Parish Church this morning, Brewster,” continued Dashing Daracotte. “But get on with your story and be sharp about it.” And the poacher obeyed.

It was a stirring tale, for Sam’s shrewd eye had seen the whole of that romantic episode from start to finish.

He had found Manchester all agog, its cobbled streets thronged with excited folk, from whom he

learned that the rebel army had reached Wigan, less than twenty miles away, the previous evening, and nobody knowing what was going to happen next. Some said they would go to Liverpool, others Chester, but they were all wrong.

What did happen was certainly very remarkable, for three persons came into Manchester in the early morning, having marched all through the night—a sergeant armed with a blunderbuss, a girl, and a drummer, the courageous trio immediately beginning to beat up recruits for the Prince, offering five guineas bounty, to be paid when His Highness should arrive.

Soon, however, seeing no sign of the rebel army, the mob grew threatening; but Sergeant Dickson kept them off with his blunderbuss very pluckily, until the Manchester Jacobites rallied to his aid, and by nightfall he had enrolled 180 recruits.

Meanwhile the cavalry rode in about ten; and between two and three in the afternoon Bonnie Prince Charlie, in Highland dress, his target slung on his back, preceded by a single piper, entered on foot, and went to the house of Mr. John Dickenson in Market Street Lane, which had been chosen for his quarters.

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“He may be a Pretender,” said Sam Brewster, “but he’s a rare good ‘un to look at, and a fine figure of a man.”

“What, Sam?” cried Mr. Daracotte with a short laugh. “You don’t mean to say you were tempted to turn rebel?”

“A did turn,” grinned the poacher with a sly wink. “A ’listed with t’ sergeant, who slipped a shilling into me hand, while his sweet-heart gave me a white cockade, an’ here it is; but ’twas only that I could talk the better to them, and I’d a rare crack with the drummer, who comes fro’ Halifax. He told me the Prince has only one pair o’ shoes to his name, and he wore ’em down so, that he got a blacksmith to nail a thin sheet o’ iron on the sole of one of ’em, telling him that he was the only smith who had ever shod a king. Not but what he’s got a carriage, but he lent that to one of his lords, who’s an old man. But, by gum! what wi’ church bells ringing, and every winder got a lighted candle in it by order, ye’d have thought t’ town had gone mad.”

He threw the bunch of white ribbon into the fire as he spoke, and went on to tell of the Clan regiments in their strange garb, who paid for everything they took and obeyed their officers,

furnishing guards and sentries with the same order and precision one might have expected from regular troops.

And all the while Dashing Daracotte snorted and sniffed, and looked mighty fierce, crying : “Come here and listen to this,” as man after man of his troop arrived and crowded into the room.

All wore their red hunting coats in lieu of uniform, some with jockey caps, others with cocked hats, but each displaying the black cockade of Hanover, and every man armed with a broad-sword and a brace of brass-mounted pistols.

“Gentlemen ! ” cried their colonel, “we have waited a long time, and with no little patience, but to-day we are going to shoy these rebel dogs what Daracotte’s Light Horse can do. Hallo ! Who have we here ? ” And all eyes turned to the window as a dragoon galloped past, pulling up at the inn door with a tremendous clatter.

“Are these Colonel Daracotte’s quarters ? ” they heard him shout as one of them flung the door open, and the next moment the man dismounted and stamped into the outer room, his long sword tilting up his scarlet cloak behind him, for all the world as though he had a tail.

“ Make way there! Make way! ” said the squire. “ Now, my lad, *I’m* Colonel Daracotte. What do you want with me? ”

Several of the troop exclaimed as the man opened his cloak, revealing the uniform he wore, which was that of Bland’s Dragoons, Major Ormerod’s old regiment, and he reeled with exhaustion as he fumbled in his gauntlet glove for the dispatch he carried.

“ Give him a dram of strong waters, somebody,” said Dashing Daracotte, as he took the paper. “ You’ve ridden far, my man? ”

“ Yes, your honour. ’Tis five-and-twenty good miles from Newcastle-under-Lyme, and the roads wellnigh as bad as any I ever saw in Flanders. I’ve killed one horse on the way, and seized another in the King’s name, and I’d scarce be here now if I hadn’t chanced on your honour’s messenger some way back.”

Daracotte clapped his hand to his brow and thundered out an oath.

“ Plague take the Duke and the whole bunch of ’em,” he roared. “ His orders are that we fall back on the spur and join him. Into your saddles, gentlemen. My horse there! Let me find every man in his place and the roll called on my return.

I must have speech with Major Ormerod before we start. There will be no fight to-day." And he strode out in a towering rage, followed by Puce, the liver-and-white setter, to fling himself into his saddle and galloped furiously to Ormerod Hall.

The family was at breakfast, the girls in a flutter of excitement at the prospect of the church parade, and Cornet Humphrey the first to see his commander coming.

"There must be something in the wind," he said, starting up, "for here's the colonel riding full tilt."

"I never knew him ride anything else, the mad-brained fellow," grunted Uncle Egerton, getting on to his legs; and Mrs. Ormerod caught her breath as the squire's tremendous voice was heard, roaring: "Major, where are you?" a dozen length's away.

"Here I am, Daracotte. What's the matter now? Have you got some news?" And Uncle Egerton stumped out to meet his visitor.

"Ay, news enough," was the angry reply. "The rebels will pass this way in less than an hour, and we've orders from the Duke to show 'em our backs. What's your advice, Ormerod?"

Should we fight or fly?—for that's what it amounts to!"

He had thrust the despatch into the major's hand, and Egerton Ormerod's grey eyebrows twitched as he read it.

“This is an order, Daracotte; you must obey it,” he said sternly. “How soon can you march?”

“Now! They'll be waiting for me by the time I get back.”

“Then there's no more to be said. Humphrey!”

“Here am I, uncle,” responded the lad, striding across the entrance hall, booted and spurred, his sword-belt slung over his right shoulder and his guidon pole in his hand.

“Kiss your mother, boy,” grunted the major, “and tell the girls to get their cloaks on.”

Humphrey ran into the breakfast-room.

“We march in ten minutes, mother,” he said, as she flung her arms round his neck. “You must not keep me, dear. There is Mobberley with my horse now.”

They clung round him, but he disengaged himself gently after kissing them all, wrung his uncle's hand as he passed him in the doorway,

and galloped after the retreating figure of his colonel.

“And so my last son is taken from me!” murmured Mrs. Ormerod, as Ruth got her mother’s mantle and tied the ribbons of her hood beneath her chin.

Uncle Egerton was already stumping down the avenue, and as they came out on to the terrace steps the distant sound of the church bells fell on their ears—and their hearts, too.

They had scarcely reached the gates when the squire came trotting out of the lane end, Puce bounding beside him, and immediately behind, Cornet Humphrey at the head of Dashing Darcotte’s Light Horse, riding two and two.

They made a brave show in their pink coats, which gave them quite the appearance of a uniformed troop, though the horses were all colours.

Following the example of their leader, the officers doffed their hats and bowed gracefully to the group at the gate, while the men grinned and brandished their swords in the wintry sunshine.

Humphrey had only time for one brief look at his mother as they trotted by. Uncle Egerton, very erect in his old red coat, stood bare-headed at the salute until the troop had passed,

and the rearguard dipped out of sight beyond the top of the hill.

“The boy rides in brave company, Mary,” said the old dragoon, as the group lingered, apparently unable to tear itself away from the spot. “I am only sorry we could not see them ride in the opposite direction.”

Mrs. Ormerod did not echo the sentiment. Instead she breathed a silent prayer of thankfulness; but it was destined to be a very short one.

“Now then!” exclaimed Uncle Egerton, suddenly starting. “What’s this I hear?”

The church bells had ceased, and away in the distance swelled up another sound they had never heard before; a sound that rose and fell among the woods through which the road wound, as yet a long way off, but growing nearer and nearer.

It was the skirl of the Highland bagpipes. The rebels were coming!

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE LONDON ROAD

MAJOR ORMEROD'S face flamed the colour of his red coat, and he raised a warning arm.

“Listen!” he exclaimed hoarsely. “The dogs are passing Withy Lane Farm now! This is no place for you, Mary, and the girls. Get you all indoors.”

“What, Egerton? Would you rob me of the chance of seeing Richard, if, indeed, it is the Pretender’s army that approaches?”

“Forgive me, Mary, I had not thought of that,” said the major quickly. “Stay where you are, then, but remember the servants are yonder, and your son’s folly is unsuspected by the household. Mobberley is the only one who knows the truth, and his lips are sealed. No scene, mind you—no curtsying when the Prince goes by. There will be a sequel to all this tomfoolery, and I wish I saw the end of it.”

Poor, simple-minded, single-hearted Uncle

Egerton—to think that Master Richard's departure and its cause had not been the chief topic of talk in the servants' hall ever since the night of his going—though, to do them justice, not a word had they breathed outside the Ormerod domain.

And now, as men and maids, with Corporal Mobberley among them, lined the park paling at a respectful distance from the family, one thought was in all their minds: they were going to see the Pretender, but, better than that, Master Richard might pass that way, and they would see him, too, if they were lucky.

I don't know whether Ruth and Lucy kept diaries, but I have before me a little book with Margery Ormerod's name inside the cover, in which that young lady seems to have set down all the simple happenings of their quiet life from day to day.

From it I have taken this little extract, being quite sure that she has told the story much better than I could.

“*Lord's Day*.—We all went to the gates to see Humphrey depart with Col. Daracotte's Light Horse, and very brave they looked.

A LOYAL YOUNG REBEL

“It seemed scarce five minutes after their departure, though it must have been longer, when a troop of men in strange dress rode by. They took little notice of us, and Uncle Egerton said they were Hussars.

“Then came a troop of gentlemen in blue and red, whose officers took off their hats.” [“Richard has told us since that they were the Prince’s Life Guards,” is written in the margin.]

“Then we saw some very strange men in Scotch clothes, with their knees bare, and with them the Prince, walking on foot like one of themselves.

“I never saw anyone so handsome in all my life, and when Richard, who was riding beside him, to our great joy pointed to us, the Prince doffed his Highland bonnet with the most gracious smile in the world, so that we were all fain to drop our best curtsy, which made Uncle Egerton look as if he could have killed us.

“When Richard sprang from his horse and embraced our mother I could not forbear weeping, and I was sorry for Richard, because I saw him look at Uncle Egerton, who turned his head away and stood as stiff as a poker, with a mighty stern face all the while.

“Our mother kept up wonderfully, though I thought she would have fainted when Richard mounted again, which he did after a few moments.

“My sisters and I helped her back to the house, but we heard the sound of the bagpipes and the rumble of cannons and carts for a long time.

“Once from the window I saw a red banner going by, and wished I had still been at the gate.

“Later we had prayers, and I know that mine were that those fierce men should not overtake Humphrey’s regiment.”

It is indeed a pity that Miss Margery Ormerod was unable to recount more of that march past. Perhaps we can supply a few of the details.

The major, his silver-laced hat pressed squarely on his powdered wig, remained alone, a pathetic, martial figure with his wooden leg, and a look of fierce scorn on his clean-shaven face; and by him, with the muscular stride of strong, unfettered limbs, and the rhythmic swish of their kilts, the Highlanders swung along the London Road,

three abreast in a column that seemed never ending.

Appin's men, Camerons in their red tartans under "the gentle" Lochiel, Cluny's Macphersons with that red silk standard in their midst, bearing the motto "*Tandem Triumphans*" (at last triumphant) on a white ground. Then Glenbucket and Glengarry, followed by Clanranald and Keppoch, those three latter clans wearing a sprig of heather in their bonnets, the badge of the Macdonalds.

After them went Atholl's Brigade, in their dark plaids, and the Duke of Perth's Regiment, which guarded the seven guns captured at Prestonpans, and the six Swedish pieces, with the clattering baggage wagons.

Lord Ogilvy's Regiment, and that of Roy Stewart, were the next to pass, Pitsligo's Horse bringing up the rear, Lord Pitsligo himself, who was old and infirm, riding in the Prince's coach.

And all the while Major Ormerod's keen eye was noting the soldierly mien of that bold band of adventurers; their tin water-bottles and canvas haversacks, which they owed to the forethought of Lord George Murray; their polished

musket barrels flashing in the sun, and the look of confident assurance of victory on every face.

“ Egad ! ” muttered the old dragoon. “ Their horsemen are nothing more than a mounted rabble—I could rout them with a corporal’s guard—but their foot are by no means to be despised.”

There were few in the band who did not turn their heads at sight of the King’s red coat, and some laughed, and others spoke in Gaelic, and the mounted officers looked curiously at the veteran.

Several ladies were on horseback in the column, and not a few camp followers rode on the wagons or trudged through the snow in defiance of the Prince’s orders, but at last they had passed, the sound of the pipes grew fainter in the distance, and Uncle Egerton retraced his steps up the avenue, leaning heavily on his cane.

“ Zounds ! ” he muttered to himself. “ If those fellows are not stayed very soon, I foresee great trouble. London is full of Jacobites, and the French King has only to make a landing in their favour for all the fat to be in the fire. Old John Ligonier is the only man to deal with the

business, and he has been superseded by Cumberland, who cost us Fontenoy by his bungling."

Corporal Mobberley overtook his master, and fell into step with him.

"Well, Mobberley, and what do you think of the scoundrels?" queried the major fiercely.

"Saving your honour's pardon, I don't like the look of things," replied the corporal with a shake of his head.

"Nor I, and that's plain English," said his master, lowering his voice. "Did you see Master Richard?"

"Ecod, yes, sir, and mighty fine he looked," said the corporal, unable to hide the gleam of pleasure in his eyes.

"Mighty fiddlesticks," grunted the major. "Did anyone else recognize him, think you, in that mountebank dress?" And the honest servant promptly lied to spare his old officer's feelings.

"No, sir, the maids had eyes for none but the Pretender himself. They've lost their hearts to him, one and all."

"I knew it, the jades! You should have kept them in the kitchen, Mobberley. Hearts, indeed! There never was a Stuart that had one yet, which

I suppose is why the rascals must needs win other people's. But, Mobberley, think you the rebels' advance guard will come up with our troop?" " And this time the corporal answered truthfully enough, with no little emphasis.

" Nay ; I'll wager that won't happen, for I saw Colonel Daracotte break into a gallop at the top of the hill yonder, and your honour knows what a pace it is when the squire sets it."

" Heigh-ho ! I hope you're right from the bottom of my soul," grunted Uncle Egerton, and Mobberley, having his own professional opinion of Dashing Daracotte's Light Horse, notwithstanding their undoubted loyalty, echoed a devout " Amen " under his breath.

CHAPTER XIV

TO DERBY—AND AFTER !

THAT night Prince Charles Edward slept at Macclesfield in a house in Jordangate, after a council of war had been held, for at last they had definite news of the strength and whereabouts of the King's forces.

In the town they learned that the Duke of Cumberland's army, consisting of five mounted regiments and eleven battalions of foot, with an artillery train of thirty pieces of cannon, was quartered at Coventry, Lichfield and Stafford, with detachments in the neighbouring towns, and it was decided to push past them by a series of forced marches along the London Road, after Lord George Murray should have made a feint against the Royal Army to give the Prince's men a day's rest before starting out.

Dashing Daracotte had got no farther than Congleton that same night, for all his haste, and there he found the Duke of Kingston's Light Horse, another corps of mounted volunteers which

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had been raised in Nottingham to fight the Pretender.

The little town was crowded, and Cornet Humphrey, after lodging his colour at the colonel's headquarters, was glad to wrap himself in his cloak and taste the delights of active service by sleeping on the floor.

Once he was awakened, and sat up, thinking the alarm had been given. But it was only his colonel, and a dozen other rollicking blades, who were making a night of it in the room below, and singing “*Britons, strike home!*” at the tops of their voices.

The grey light was just showing the outline of the windows when bugle horns and trumpets roused them all in good earnest, and there was a brisk exchange of shots on the river bank.

At last it had come!—and putting on his sword, Humphrey Ormerod rushed downstairs, to find everything astir in the raw December dawn.

Men were mounting in hot haste; others struggled to tighten girths with frozen fingers. Colonel Daracotte was bellowing for his horse, and a picket of Kingston's was already retiring up the street in some disorder.

“The dogs are coming!” shouted a score of voices, as he darted through the open door and seized the guidon, which he had sworn to defend with his life.

As Humphrey scrambled into his saddle there was light enough to make out the head of a strong column of the enemy beyond a gap in the houses, advancing behind their skirmishers, who had driven Kingston’s pickets in; but in the confusion of the surprise he found himself swept away by the rush of Kingston’s Light Horse, who were falling back at speed for their own alarm post at the other end of the town.

To no purpose did he cry, “Gentlemen, by your leave!” and try to pull his nag round, cumbered as he was by the awkward guidon pole. The street was filled from side to side with eager men, and, very much against his will, he was carried a hundred yards and more from Colonel Daracotte’s lodging before he managed to extricate himself.

When he turned at last, the dropping fire of musketry was spreading on both sides of the town, and before he had reached the inn again he pulled up just in time, for a surge of bonneted

men carrying basket-hilted broadswords and targets, and shouting in Gaelic, ran like stags out of a side alley, making for his own headquarters.

To his dismay, at the same moment the notes of his own bugle horn sounding the retreat came from the fields at the back of the inn, and he realized that if he were to escape capture he must turn and ride for it.

He could hear Dashing Daracotte's stentorian voice mingling with the blare of the horn somewhere away on his left, and at the first lane end he came to on that side of the High Street he spurred into a gallop, vainly trying to recall what Uncle Egerton had laid down as the proper thing to do if he should ever find himself in a tight place.

Oddly enough, all he could remember were the words of the major's favourite motto : “ Fear God and honour the King ! ” and the latter could be best accomplished by rejoining his regiment.

Women and children were screaming in the back yards. He almost rode into a drove of them as they rushed, panic-stricken, into the lane. A voice behind him shouted : “ Spur !

Spur!" at the very moment that his eyes caught sight of Daracotte's Light Horse taking a hedge in great confusion on the other side of the open meadow.

But the same fierce men who had surged out of the alley across the street had gained the fields before him, and securing the guidon pole under the thumb of his bridle hand, Cornet Humphrey drew his father's sword.

"Give him his head and ride to the right, fool," cried the same voice behind him. "Are you tired of life already, boy?"

He heard the words as in a dream, for a mounted officer detached himself at that moment from the advancing Highlanders, attracted by the sight of the fluttering colour.

Humphrey turned to receive the attack, and their swords met with a loud ring.

"Surrender, sir," shouted his opponent, "or I shall cut you down!"

But the man in the blue cloak, who had followed Humphrey along the lane, dashed in between them, and flung their swords up with his riding whip.

"Humphrey! — Dick! Where are your eyes?" cried Ned Nethersole sternly, and the



"The man dashed in between them. 'Humphrey! Dick!
Where are your eyes?'"

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brothers recovered their weapons with a gasp of dismay.

“ You will thank me some day, both of you,” said Ned “ Neitherside,” flinging his severed whip on to the snow. “ Quick, Humphrey ! I am as little anxious for capture as you are.” And Dick watched the pair ride like the wind and leap the hedge neck and neck.

“ How ? Have you lost him, Mr. Ormerod ? ” cried a handsome young Highlander, who had sped forward to the aide-de-camp’s side.

“ Yes, Esmé, thank Heaven ! ” said Dick in a choking voice. “ That was my brother ! ”

“ I am glad for your sake,” said Esmé Cameron, his own face flushing, “ though the colour would have been a welcome trophy for His Royal Highness. But the Redcoats are in full retreat. We have taken the town without losing a man, and I hear that the gentleman our cavalry patrols captured in his shirt is Cumberland’s chief spy—Weir.”

Dick said nothing. The landscape swam before his eyes as he thought of his mother’s kiss of yesterday, and how near he had been that morning to a tragedy unthinkable.

Nor was Humphrey Ormerod behind Dick in

heartfelt gratitude for Nethersole's promptness, and as they came in sight of the fox-hunters, who had recovered from their surprise and were getting into something like order, the Cornet slipped his sword back into its sheath and held out his hand.

His lip quivered and he could not find his voice, but Mr. Nethersole laughed a little more boisterously, perhaps, than the occasion seemed to demand.

“Some day you shall show your thanks, Humphrey, by buying me a new whip. Just now this is no place for a peaceable onlooker, and I am going to make myself scarce.”

“Then you haven’t joined the Pretender, sir?”

“No, sir,” replied the highwayman. “Have you forgotten that your valiant colonel yonder, who will roar himself into a fit if he is not careful, dubbed me Ned ‘Neitherside’?” And he left the boy very puzzled, and struck away across country on that splendid brown roadster of his.

Lord George Murray had produced exactly the effect he had desired, and hastily concentrating all his forces at Lichfield in expectation

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of immediate attack, Cumberland left the road to London open.

The Highlanders spent the night around Congleton, and then, marching with great swiftness next day, Lord George turned off to Leek, pushing on to Ashbourne, where, after a night march, the Pretender and the rest of the army joined him on the 3rd.

At sight of the mountain peaks of Derbyshire the spirits of the Clans rose to fever heat, and when they entered Derby, which was only 127 miles from London, their ultimate victory seemed assured.

But the old proverbs tell us that “discretion is ever the better part of valour,” and “there’s many a slip ’twixt the cup and the lip.”

In spite of their triumphal progress, the English Jacobites had not risen, nor had the King of France sent his promised aid.

It was to no purpose that King George packed his valuables on board ship, ready for immediate flight; that the Bank of England only saved itself from ruin by paying its panic-stricken customers in sixpences, and so gaining time.

That bold little band of heroes, numbering less than six thousand, were faced by odds too

great to be undertaken. At any rate, that was the opinion of all the Highland chiefs but one, including Lord George Murray himself, the only sane military head in the whole of that great adventure.

In vain did Bonnie Prince Charlie, at his quarters in Lord Exeter's house in Full Street, urge a last dashing attempt to recover the throne of his ancestors. The Duke of Cumberland was behind him with a great array of horse and foot. Marshal Wade was only two marches off with ten thousand men, and a great army was reported to have assembled at the camp at Finchley, although, as a matter of fact, only a handful ever got there.

News came of reinforcements for the Prince that had landed in Scotland, and the council was grim and determined in its decision that the proper course was to retreat until they should be strong enough to make another attempt.

“Well, laddie,” said my Lord George as he returned from the council, “we’re going back.”

“But, my lord——!” exclaimed Dick.

“You are a gallant boy,” interrupted the elder man. “If your countrymen had only shown your spirit, all would be well ~~with~~ the

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Cause. As matters stand we march at dawn, leaving a party at Swarkstone Bridge, and sending the Hussars along the road to deceive the Fat Boy of Cumberland. As for ourselves, we must put our best foot foremost, and I am to command the rearguard."

Perhaps the two saddest pages in history are the flight of Louis the Sixteenth to Varennes and the retirement of Prince Charles Edward's Army from Derby on that cold December morning.

At first the Highlanders were full of elation, until, as the light came, they saw that they were going back along those weary leagues they had just trodden with such high hope.

The pipes were silent ; their officers rode with stern, set faces ; and the Prince himself, a changed man from that moment, no longer marched on foot with the rest, but mounted his horse, sullen and heartsick, and dawdled in the rear, as though he no longer cared what became of him.

It was at night when they passed Ormerod Hall again, and only a dim light in his mother's window met Dick's eyes as he strained them so eagerly in the darkness.

“Well, Richard,” said Mr. Josiah Wakefield, who had ridden his horse up beside him. “And how like you the look of things now?”

“Indeed, sir, I am bitterly disappointed; but since Lord George holds the retirement to be necessary, there is no more to be said. When we join Drummond and the winter is over, we shall be this way again, never fear.”

“But I do fear, for all that,” said his mentor in a voice so low that the boy could scarce catch his words above the scrunch of their horses’ hoofs. “The game is up, Dick! My Lord Newcastle and all those rogues who lured us on to our undoing have turned craven, and think only of their own skins. You hearkened to my advice once on a time. Take it now, if you are wise.”

“I do not grasp your meaning, Mr. Wakefield,” exclaimed the boy. “What, then, is your advice?”

“That you watch your opportunity and turn aside here. You will be safer in yonder stately home of yours than where we are going.”

Neither could see the other’s face, but that of the spy was white and pinched, and there was a bitter sneer on his lip.

“What, Mr. Wakefield?” said his old pupil

in a voice of hushed wonderment. “ Forsake the Prince when his head is in danger? ”

“ He will forsake you without consulting your convenience, sooner or later,” replied Wakefield. “ Have you not marked his mien since we left Derby? Do you not see how he has turned more than ever against Lord George, who, as you justly admit, is the only soldier amid this crowd of puffed-up chieftains and decrepit Scots lords? ”

“ Mr. Wakefield,” said Dick, bending towards the speaker, “ if 'twere light I would make you eat your words, sir! They are those of a traitor to the Cause. Moreover, it touches the honour of an Ormerod that you should bid him leave a sinking ship, as they say the rats do. No, sir, the Cause is not lost. The struggle is indeed but begun. I have done with you, but I shall stand by Bonnie Prince Charlie while there is a drop of blood in my veins.”

“ As you like, Dick,” came the mocking voice. “ They say there is no fool like an old fool, but I begin to think that a young one may be worse.”

CHAPTER XV

BACK TO THE BORDER!

POOR Dick strained his eyes to catch the last glimpse of that light in his mother's window, wondering how it came to be burning so early, and whether she was ill.

Then, as the old familiar landmarks of his childhood passed behind one after another, and the laggard morning crept over the frozen landscape he knew so well, much came back to his mind, making him bite his lip and frown thoughtfully.

The chimneys of Withy Lane Farm struck a chord of memory, and he found himself living that strange meeting at Congleton over again.

“Mr. Nethersole a highwayman! Josiah Wakefield turning against the Prince after all the devotion he held for him! Truly I am unlucky in my friends!” said the young aide-de-camp gloomily.

Much had happened since their eager march

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along that same road to the sound of the church bells little more than a week ago.

Then they had been full of hope and confidence. Now the clans swung sullenly back, the pipes silent, the mounted officers muffled in their plaids, the men muttering in Gaelic, all bent on retracing those terrible miles that lay between them and their native land with all the haste possible.

Hearing his own name, Dick turned his head, to find Esmé Cameron riding up alongside him, and it was the first time they had had speech together since the retreat began.

“So this is your part of the world, Dick, and you’re welcome to it!” laughed the Scottish lad. “Of all the flat districts, I have seen nothing like it since we crossed the Border.”

“About as flat as our prospects, eh?” retorted Dick.

“Nay, nay,” responded young Cameron promptly. “Our prospects are the reverse of that. True, ‘tis disheartening, having come so far, that we should have to retrace our steps, but ‘tis the fault of my Lord John Drummond, as Lochiel himself has been telling me a while back.”

“How so?” inquired Dick. “What has Drummond to do with the retirement?”

“All and everything,” said Esmé Cameron. “MacLaughlan was sent to him from Carlisle, as you know, with orders to follow us by forced marches; at Derby his reply came, refusing to do so!”

“But why?” And Esmé laughed contemptuously as he made answer.

“For the very paltry excuse that he was commanding French troops and had strict injunctions from King Louis not to advance upon anything rash until the Scottish fortresses had fallen. What think you of that? And yet in the same breath he says he has ten thousand men under him!”

“More than twice our numbers,” nodded Dick. “If we could march a hundred and seventy miles with our handful, he could well have joined us.”

Neither of them knew that Lord John Drummond had grossly exaggerated the strength of his force, which only consisted of the *émigré* regiment of Royal Scots, some Irish pickets, and two troops of Fitzjames’s Regiment of Horse, a Jacobite regiment in the service of France; but

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the exaggeration had a great deal to do with the retreat from Derby.

On such slight matters does history so often turn!

“ Well, all things happen for the best, Esmé, and when we are back this way again in the spring and you see our woods clothed with green and the hawthorn blooming in the hedgerows, maybe you’ll alter your opinion of my part of the country,” laughed Dick slyly. “ And now I must push forward, having a message for Clanranald.”

League after league that brave little column retreated in two divisions, entering Manchester on the evening of the 9th of December.

There the Prince had intended to halt for a day, but the town had turned hostile and strong guards were kept under arms all night, while the cavalry patrolled the roads.

A violent mob of eleven thousand folk, armed with scythes and hedge stakes, had threatened to bar their entry, but they were soon dispersed, and a fine of five thousand pounds was inflicted on the town, which was evacuated early next morning by the strong advice of Lord George Murray.

The country people had now begun to fall on any sick or stragglers, and at Wigan somebody fired at O'Sullivan in mistake for the Prince. In consequence the Highlanders began to get out of hand and plundered wherever they could.

But, thanks to the clever strategy of Lord George in leaving a force at Swarkstone Bridge when the retreat began from Derby, and sending his horsemen out in various directions, the rebels were well on the way before the Duke of Cumberland had any news of their movement, and when the "Fat Boy" reached Macclesfield at eleven o'clock on the night of the 10th, the Pretender was already two marches ahead.

The Royal Duke, or "Billy," as his men called him, although almost too stout to sit in the saddle, made up in energy for his indifferent generalship.

After a few hours' rest at Macclesfield, in the same house the Prince had occupied, he called a march for four o'clock in the morning, with his dragoons and a thousand foot, some of the latter seated behind the troopers, the remainder mounted on horses provided by the neighbouring gentry.

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And then began a chase in right earnest over those terrible roads; but the hardy Highlanders had a good start, and kept it.

When the Duke entered Manchester the rebels were in Preston, where they halted for a day; when the van of the royal force reached Preston, which they did on the 13th, the Prince's rearguard had left the town four hours previously for Lancaster, where they had another day's rest.

It was known that General Oglethorpe had joined the Duke at Preston, with Montague's and Wade's Horse, St. George's Dragoons,* and his own corps of Georgia Rangers, after a three days' march of a hundred miles over ice-bound roads, and the rearguard was kept keenly on the alert.

“Our troubles are beginning, Mr. Ormerod,” said Lord George when Dick presented himself in the blackness of the early December morning. “Although our prisoners of last night make me pretty certain that we have passed Master Wade, we should see something of our pursuers

* In the London Museum you may see Colonel St. George's scarlet uniform and green velvet housings for yourselves, and very handsome they are.—D. H. P.

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to-day by rights, and I would our rumbling guns and rotten wagons were safely over the hills."

"But are we never to give them another Prestonpans with our broadswords, my lord?" said Dick ruefully.

"Listen to the young fire-eater!" smiled Murray. "Truly, boy, you are as keen set on a battle as the Prince himself. We shall fight when the time comes, and we shall beat them again, but that is not yet. Which minds me His Highness has just driven away in his coach, so get you to the bridge at the other end of the town and hasten the artillery train. Their orders are to start at five o'clock."

Dick found the guns already moving off and the long street of Kendal echoing to the clatter of their wheels. Perth's Redcoats were just crossing the bridge, followed by young Lord Ogilvy's Regiment, and the Laird of Glenbucket, an old veteran of seventy-two, who rode by hunched up on a grey Highland pony at the head of his men.

Daylight was creeping over the valley town when his own turn came to leave it, and they began the long climb for Shap Fell, where the

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heathery moors, a thousand feet above, were still white with snow.

Less than five miles out of Kendal the wagons broke down, and there they stuck, with no sleep that night, and harassed by a furious storm of wind and rain, which luckily kept the dragoons in their quarters.

Years afterwards Dick could recall Glengarry's men carrying two hundred cannon-balls up the hill in their arms, bribed by the dram of strong waters which Lord George promised them; a second night without sleep in Shap village, when shots were exchanged with Cumberland's patrols, who had got in touch with the rearguard at last, while away to westward the beacons glowed dully through the rain bursts on Helvellyn and distant Skiddaw. Also, as they set out once more for Penrith, when the guns were toiling between the hedgerows of a rutty lane, scarlet horsemen had ridden out against the skyline on the hill-top in front, and a cry of "Wade has cut us off after all!" passed through the ranks.

The murmur had seemed confirmed by the great blare of cavalry trumpets and dull roar of kettledrums that came on the wet wind, but the next moment Perth's men were climbing the hill,

while the Macdonalds raced across the fields and joined them on the crest, to find the unseen enemy no more than a few troops of light horse and a bevy of gay drummers and trumpeters, who fled at Glengarry's volley.

It had been a clever ruse of the Duke's to send them by a by-lane to intercept the rearguard, but Lord George Murray was an awkward customer to catch napping, and Dick had been forced to laugh at sight of Dashing Daracotte's skirts flying in the wind as the bellicose squire bolted so valiantly down the slope at the head of his fox-hunters.

Many memories of that wonderful retreat from Derby came back to Richard Omerod in later years, but none so vivid as the lurid setting of the sun as the weary rearguard reached Clifton Moor, to find Cumberland's troopers awaiting them in grim earnest this time, four thousand strong.

It was a country of loose stone walls and thick thorn hedges, towards which the Duke's dismounted troopers advanced boldly enough, until the moon, straggling out at intervals, betrayed their coming, and the rebels' muskets accounted for a good many of them.

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The Macphersons having meanwhile cut a way through the hedge with their swords, Lord George cried “Claymore!” and headed a charge which sent the troopers falling back upon their supports, while the brave rebel leader returned to the road again, bareheaded, after losing bonnet and periwig in the charge.

Instead of coming to Murray’s aid with his whole force, which would undoubtedly have routed Cumberland’s cavalry, the Prince sent repeated orders to Lord George to join him in Penrith at once, which he did, only to find the Prince setting off for Carlisle there and then—another sixteen miles of darkness for that indomitable rearguard.

But Clifton Moor had cost the “Fat Boy” over a hundred casualties, and Lord George Murray scarce a dozen.

The Highland claymores had bitten so deeply that the rest of the retirement was made without interruption, and they reached Carlisle after covering 181 miles, which is the distance from Derby by the road they took, without losing a single gun.

There Dick saw the Manchester Regiment for the last time the Prince very foolishly leav-

ing it behind to garrison the town, against earnest advice ; and the subsequent fate of Colonel Townley and his officers on Kennington Common, on the spot where the Church now stands, is well known.

At three o'clock on the morning of December 20, which chanced to be Prince Charles Edward's birthday, that gallant little band of adventurers left Carlisle for the Border, reaching the bank of the river Esk about two o'clock the same afternoon.

The heavy rains had swollen the river to a depth of four feet, the water still rising, and there was no time to be lost. So the cavalry rode in five-and-twenty yards above the ford to break the force of the rushing current, and, linking their arms in ranks of ten and twelve abreast, the Highlanders plunged in.

Half-way across, as the Prince rode with a boy behind him, he caught two men by the hair as they were swept off their feet, calling loudly for help in Gaelic—about the only sensible thing he was reported to have done during the whole of the retreat.

Dick being well mounted, like the Duke of Perth, rode back several times and carried a

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man over on the croup of his saddle, and in that manner it happened that the little army reached Scottish soil again without losing a single man in the passage, and only leaving about forty behind them, including the wounded at Clifton Moor.

Once on the other side fires were lighted, and the pipers striking up, the clansmen danced round the blaze in their joy at finding themselves once more in their native land.

As Dick stood watching them, his arm round the neck of the brave little roan that had carried him so well, he heard a soft step behind him, a hand was laid lightly on his shoulder, and he turned to see the Prince smiling at him.

Off came Dick's bonnet in a trice.

“ Nay, Mr. Ormerod, do not uncover, for the night is cold. I saw you at the ford just now, working like a Trojan for us, and my Lord George has nothing but high praise for his aide-de-camp. Ah, boy, had your misguided countrymen shown your loyalty we should all be in London town to-night ! ”

It was the first time that Dick had had speech with his hero since they had left Derby, but his

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flaming face and the sparkle in his brown eyes made answer enough.

“We shall not forget your devotion when the time comes,” said the Prince with another of those winning smiles with which the Stuarts lured so many brave hearts to their doom ; and he passed on into the circle of the firelight, leaving Dick happier than any king.

CHAPTER XVI

CULLODEN

DICK ORMEROD awoke.

He had been dreaming of that meeting with the Prince, and stared blankly for a moment when he saw that the face bending over him was that of Esmé Cameron, as pinched and hollow-cheeked as his own.

“Alas, Esmé, I thought I was once more on the bank of the Esk, and that His Highness was speaking to me,” he murmured ruefully. “Why have you roused me? I forget to feel hungry when I am asleep.”

“True, dear friend, and you are not the only one!” said the young Highlander with a sad smile, for neither of them had tasted anything but a bowl of cabbage soup and a solitary biscuit for twenty-four hours. “Strange your dreams should hark back wellnigh five months, and if my foster-brother were here he could tell us what it means—but I forgot, Dick, you do not believe in dreams.”

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“No, I don’t,” said Dick stoutly. “But I do believe that you are the kindest, most unselfish soul in the world, Esmé; again you have covered me with your plaid and lain exposed in this bitter weather. Why, your teeth are chattering with the cold!”

“I am better able to bear it than you,” replied his friend. “But I set two snares overnight. Shall we go and see if there is anything in them before those thievish Macdonalds anticipate us?”

Dick drew up his numbed legs and rose stiffly.

“The very thought of food inspires me to great deeds,” he laughed oddly under his breath, as they stole away through the rows of famished men, huddled together on the open moor without tents or shelter of any kind, where they had flung themselves down after the night march.

The army of the Young Pretender, in spite of its victory over the brutal Henry Hawley at Falkirk, had retreated north in the vain hope of reinforcements and supplies from France, and by that time, the April of 1746, it was almost at its last gasp.

All through the night that had just gone

they had tramped twelve long miles over moorland and swamp, hoping to surprise the Duke's camp at Nairn, but dawn was at hand before they reached it; their second column straggled wearily behind, and the starved, dispirited men were obliged to retrace their steps to the starting-point.

"This way, Dick," said young Cameron. "The bank is but a stone's throw, and full of conies' burrows; there stand three rowan-trees in a bunch, and the spot is four strides beyond the farthest of them."

"Then here are your trees, and, thank heaven, you have caught something!" cried Dick, stooping as he darted forward, holding up a plump rabbit.

The second snare was empty, but the little furry creature was worth its weight in gold to the starving pair.

"Now let Cumberland come as soon as he likes; you and I will be ready for him," said Esmé; and as they retraced their steps to the cheerless camp many a longing eye was turned on their capture.

Nothing more desolate and gloomy could well be imagined than that rolling stretch of wet

heath, which had been chosen by the incompetent O'Sullivan as a fit spot on which to meet the English army ; but the Prince, with that obstinacy that so often arises out of ignorance, would not listen to reason.

He was at the end of his tether ; his purse was empty, his men starving, and as nothing but a successful battle could retrieve their fortunes, the poor misguided young gentleman turned a deaf ear to all entreaty and brought about the ruin of his cause.

“ Nothing seems to go well with us these days,” said Dick in a low voice, as they crouched beside the fire, over which they had slung a cooking-pot, “ and my Lord George says it will be madness to receive Cumberland’s attack on this spot.”

“ We beat the Elector’s men at Prestonpans ; we made General Hawley run for his life at Falkirk,” replied Esmé proudly. “ It is only when the cowards shrink behind stone walls, as they did at Stirling, that they can cope with us ; and as for that, we took Carlisle, notwithstanding our drunken little jackanapes of a French engineer. No, Dick, it is not the ground that matters, but the stout arms that wield the sharp

claymores. Nothing that goes on two legs can face our men when the plaids are thrown aside and the pipes are skirling!"

"They are indeed the bravest of the brave," assented Dick. "But for all that, my Uncle Egerton would have thought twice before waiting an attack where the horse are free to ride, and our spies tell us the Duke has a strong force with him."

"Pshaw, the horse!" laughed young Cameron with mighty scorn. "I can outstrip a horse any day, and so can every man of our clan. Trust me, 'tis those jack-booted troopers who will think twice ere they come within reach of a Hieland broadsword after the trouncings they have had already. But the rabbit is done, and since there is no bread nearer than Inverness, we must eat it without."

They fell to with a will, for both were ravenous, and when Esmé had divided it with his dirk, nothing was left in a very few moments but the white bones.

"I see no sign of the redcoats," smiled Dick, as he licked his fingers, "and if they do not soon appear, we shall either have to retreat into the mountains or turn cannibals."

But far away in the distance on the eastern horizon a dark mass was moving, and it could only mean one thing.

"They're coming!" cried Esmé exultantly, his words drowned by a lusty cheer from the tired clansmen, who instantly forgot their weariness and their empty stomachs at the prospect of battle.

But for all that, many of them had already left their ranks in search of food, and in spite of the mounted officers sent to recall them, only some five thousand were finally mustered on Drummossie Moor, while another thousand slept the sleep of exhaustion among the enclosures near Culloden House, knowing nothing of what was happening until all was over.

"Yes, they're coming right enough!" said Dick. "I can see their colours waving, and if our own pipes were not making such a din we could almost hear the tap of Cumberland's drums."

Then he sprang into the saddle and followed his leader to the council which had been hastily summoned at the Prince's headquarters.

At that council, where even some of the chiefs and principal officers were so tired that they fell

asleep, Charles Edward displayed the usual obstinacy of his family and would listen to no advice.

In vain Lord George Murray pointed out the condition of the men and urged a retirement across the river Nairn, where Cumberland's cavalry would be useless. In vain Lochiel reminded him that in a few hours at most another 1,800 men would join them; to no purpose did others argue against the position O'Sullivan had chosen, which was lower than that where the enemy would presently deploy into line.

The Pretender was firm. The fight must be fought then and there; Inverness must be covered at any cost, and against the opinions of all his officers except the Irishmen, orders were given for the army to be instantly formed.

This was done in two lines—the right wing commanded by Lord George Murray, the centre by Lord John Drummond, while the Duke of Perth had the left, where the Macdonalds maintained a sullen silence.

They had long claimed the right wing as the post of honour, and brooded over their present position as an insult.

From his post at the other end of the line,

where the Atholl Murrays and the Camerons and the Stewarts of Appin were shouting defiance, Dick eagerly watched the approach of Cumberland, whose army advanced in three columns with colours flying and drums beating, to draw up also in two lines, with a couple of cannon planted between each regiment in the front rank.

Dick, examining them through a little telescope he had bought in Glasgow, drew a sigh as he recognized Uncle Egerton's old regiment, drawn up on the left of the line, with Ker's Dragoons and the Duke of Kingston's men, and behind them, among the purple heather, Dashing Daracotte's Light Horse, whom in his heart of hearts he had hoped might have been miles away. But he looked in vain for Humphrey, not knowing that young Wilcox had been made their standard-bearer in consequence of his brother's promotion.

As for the foot, in their long white gaiters, red vests, and breeches, and the various colours with which their regimentals were faced, he was forced to admit to himself that they made a formidable array, especially the Grenadier companies, in their conical cloth caps with the White

Horse of Hanover embroidered on the front flaps.

For the first time since he had turned rebel Dick Ormerod was oppressed with a sense of foreboding as he contrasted the stolid appearance of King George's well-fed infantry, standing so firmly with their feet planted wide apart and what little sun there was glinting on the polished barrels of their muskets, with the ragged, famished clansmen, who had breakfasted on nothing after the long night march, and yet were so eager to come to grips with every disadvantage on their own side.

"Oh, I wish it would begin!" he said aloud, unconscious that his words had been overheard.

" 'Twill begin soon enough for most of us," said Lord George Murray very quietly. "And 'twill end even quicker than that. Go to the Prince and tell him everything is ready."

Some distance to the rear, on a slight rise in the ground behind the second line, the young aide-de-camp found his hero on horseback, wearing tartan trews and riding boots, with the star and riband of the Thistle.

He had scarcely reached him and delivered his

message when the weather, which had been fine all morning, suddenly changed to a storm of rain and sleet, which a strong north-east wind drove from the Moray Firth into the faces of the rebels.

“Come, gentlemen, let us give Cumberland another Fontenoy!” said the Prince, drawing his sword.

Before Dick had reached his leader he saw a mounted officer and a body of men riding out from the Duke’s line, which was five hundred paces from the Prince’s army.

It was Lord Bury, sent forward to reconnoitre, and his approach was the signal for the discharge of the rebel cannon.

The Battle of Culloden had begun, and for half an hour their nine field-pieces boomed out with very little effect, being so badly laid that the shot passed for the most part over the heads of the Redcoats.

Not so Colonel Belford’s gunners, who poured a withering hail of grape-shot that piled the Highland men in swathes three deep and ploughed ghastly lanes through the waiting clans.

One round shot, laid, it is said, by the Colonel himself, killed the Prince’s groom, who was hold-

ing a led horse, and covered His Royal Highness with earth as he rode along his line bravely enough.

It was a bad beginning, and when the Prince had returned to his hillock, Lord George Murray, foreseeing the result of the carnage, sent again to him asking orders for an advance.

But Lady MacIntosh, who, like Lady Ogilvy, was there on horseback, had already given the word to the men of her clan in the centre, who rushed forward with target and broadsword.

Simultaneously the whole of the right wing dashed through the wreathing smoke and blinding sleet, mingling their slogans with shouts of “*Righ Hamish gu Bragh!*” (“For God and King James!”), and to Dick, Prestonpans and Falkirk dwindled into nothingness when compared with that tremendous onslaught.

In a trice they had burst through Barrel’s Blues and Dejean’s battalion with its yellow facings, and although the cannon of the division hurled a discharge of grape into them at two yards’ range, they captured a couple of guns.

In a moment eleven officers and 207 men of the two battalions lay stretched on the heather,

and the irresistible right wing ran on to hurl themselves against Sempill's and Conway's regiments.

But Cumberland, whatever he may have been, had trained his men well, and the two battalions, drawn up in three lines with the front ranks kneeling, reserved their fire until the fugitives had passed behind them, when they delivered a volley at half pistol range which carried havoc into the rebel ranks.

For a moment everything seemed to have been going well, but Bligh's regiment, now the Lancashire Fusiliers, poured in a terrific fire, while Wolfe's and Fleming's moved to the left of Barrel's men, who were in some disorder, and General Huske brought up Bligh's and Sempill's to take the attackers in flank and front.

Human valour—and never was it better displayed than on the right wing at Culloden—has its limits. The heather was red with blood and littered with dead and dying, and the next thing Dick saw amid the blue smoke was gallant Lochiel himself, shot through the ankles, being carried away by his devoted henchmen.

He had lost sight of Lord George Murray,

who was among the foremost, then as ever, and uncertain what to do, he suddenly remembered that he had not even drawn his own sword, when, as his fingers closed round the grip, his roan nag leapt into the air. Something seemed to strike him on the head and shoulder at the same moment, the roar of firing and the yells of the combatants receded away into the distance, and Richard Ormerod swooned under the dead horse, which providentially fell on top of him !

Unmoved by the magnificent gallantry of their comrades, the Macdonalds on the left still sulked and refused to attack. In vain did the brave old Keppoch exclaim : “ Have the children of my clan, then, forsaken me ? ” as he rushed forward alone to his death. They had a grievance and they could not forget it, and after delivering a half-hearted volley they presently turned and marched from the field with their pipes playing.

In rather less than half an hour all was over, and as the Duke of Cumberland let loose his cavalry on both wings, Humphrey Ormerod found himself galloping forward with Daracotte’s Light Horse like eager hounds freed from the leash.

Some stone walls that had protected the Prince's right had been thrown down by General Bland's orders, and the dragoons were already pouring in.

"Look yonder, Humphrey!" shouted young Wilcox. "The King's Own are getting all the fun!" And he spurred his horse a couple of lengths ahead, shortening his reins as he did so to leap a dead roan that lay stretched across his path.

Beyond the carcase of the horse crouched a lad in a red tartan, supporting a badly wounded figure, and giving a wild cry he sprang to his feet; there was a flash of reddened steel, and young Wilcox, the parson's son, slipped from the saddle, his head cleft almost in two!

Before his slayer could disengage his terrible claymore Humphrey was upon him, and as the avenging blade found Esmé Cameron's brave heart with all too sure an aim, Humphrey reined in, recognizing the roan now and the crumpled figure beyond it, which had raised itself on its left arm.

"Oh, Humphrey!" moaned Dick. "You have killed my best friend!"

“ For all that, I have found you, dear brother, thank Heaven ! But how am I to hide you in that rebel garb? For the Duke’s orders are ‘ No quarter ! ’ ”

“ I will help you,” said a familiar voice, as Ned “ Neitherside ” dismounted under cover of the smoke. “ Poor Tom Wilcox will not want his red coat any more, and the sooner we get Dick out of this the better ! ”

CHAPTER XVII

AFTER MANY DAYS

IT must have been somewhere about the end of June when Sam Brewster abandoned his tumble-down cottage, took to shaving regularly twice a week, and went to live at Withy Lane Farm, because it was at that time that Mr. Edward Nethersole returned to the little Cheshire village and took up his residence there once more.

No one saw him arrive, for he came in the night, and he and the poacher lifted something off a horse and helped it into the house between them.

Which done, and the door bolted, they carried the said "something" upstairs and laid it on a bed, where it hovered between life and death until the hot August days.

It was a shadow of its former self, and the right arm was missing, for that mysterious "something" was no less a person than poor Dick.

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How Ned “Neitherside” had got him away from the carnage on Drummossie Moor, disguised in Tom Wilcox’s coat; how he had been brought by sea after adventures wellnigh as thrilling as those of Prince Charlie himself; how they had landed him on Mersey-side, and finally deposited him on that bed in the farm attic, only the highwayman and the poacher knew, and Sam Brewster’s part had begun at the last stage of the journey.

Long before that event Dashing Daracotte and his horsemen had come roaring back from the wars up to The Load of Hay, where they sang “*Britons, Strike Home!*” as usual at the tops of their voices, and you would have thought, to listen to them, that they alone had won the battle of Culloden.

I believe they ran Kingston’s men pretty close in the horrors of the pursuit and the unmentionable massacres that won for the Duke of Cumberland the nickname of “*Butcher*” for all time; but that is another story, and Humphrey Ormerod said very little about it.

Instead he became a daily visitor to Withy Lane Farm, whither old Doctor Cobbe also drove three times a week in his gig after nightfall, and

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kept his wise lips tightly closed when he went away again.

And all the while Mrs. Ormerod waited and prayed and hoped against hope, thinking her boy still with the royal fugitive, who was known to be in hiding somewhere in the Western Highlands, defying all attempts at capture.

The very air was filled with tidings of trials and executions, the latest of them being that of the Lords Kilmarnock and Balmerino, who were beheaded on Tower Hill.

During that time of suspense kind old Uncle Egerton grew more and more uneasy, and even lost his temper with Nephew Humphrey.

“ I believe you know Dick is dead all the time ! ” he said to him angrily. “ You seem to have lost your tongue these days, and when one asks you a question you stop to think before you answer it ! ”

“ I do not know Dick is dead, sir ! ” replied Humphrey with some warmth. “ If I had done, do you think I should have allowed my mother to suffer all this while ? ”

Uncle Egerton jerked his pigtail as he shook his head dolefully.

“ No one loved the boy better than I did,

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in spite of his folly," he said in a softer voice. "I had hoped to hear that he had got away to Holland with that scoundrel Tom Leigh and his mincing jades. Anything better than this cruel suspense. At any rate, he would have been safe there; but I tremble to think what may happen if your brother should suddenly turn up, perhaps wounded. They would hang him, Humphrey! They would hang him!"

Whereat Humphrey made great show of laughing incredulously.

"Dick has not an enemy in the world, *sir*," he said, and rode away to Withy Lane Farm.

The dust of his horse had scarcely died down when another figure turned into the avenue, and was met at the Hall door by Corporal Mobberley.

"Major Ormerod is at home? Good!" said the new-comer. "And Mrs. Ormerod also? Better still! Tell them Mr. Wakefield desires to see them on a matter of importance, and be good enough to take my horse round to the stables. I shall be here some time."

Josiah Wakefield was as good as his word. The sun had been setting when his ill-omened figure flung its shadow across the terrace, and

yet, as the clock over the stables struck half-past ten he was still closeted with Mrs. Ormerod and the major in the panelled morning-room, the door of which was locked and the curtains drawn tightly over the windows.

The fireplace above which Colonel Ormerod's portrait hung was deeply recessed, and almost high enough for a man to stand upright within it.

Being in black shadow, no one saw the secret door that had opened noiselessly at its far corner, nor the three figures who had come along the passage in the thickness of the wall, and startled by the words they heard, knelt there, listening, scarce able to credit that so vile a creature as Josiah Wakefield could exist.

“Infamous scoundrel!” roared the major. “Is there no end to your villainy?” And it was those words that had made Mr. Edward Nethersole hold up a cautioning hand to his companions.

“My good sir!” laughed the Jacobite spy. “This world is divided into two kinds of folk—the hawks and the pigeons.”

“The hawk, sir, is a gentleman among birds. You are a carrion crow!”

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“As you like. But even crows have their uses; and, egad, you ought to thank me for the news that your young rebel is still alive. Before I go I will tell you where you may find him, and that is much nearer than you imagine.”

“Oh, where is he?” exclaimed Mrs. Ormerod, stretching out her hands towards their tormentor; but Wakefield only smiled his oily smile, enjoying his triumph to the uttermost.

“Madam, a little patience and you shall know. But there is this other matter at which I have hinted. Yours is a wealthy family. I am a poor man. Had the Pretender’s venture ended other than it has, you would have thanked me for enlisting Richard in the Cause. Now you have just placed four thousand guineas in my hands to prevent my revealing to the Government that an Ormerod turned rebel.”

“Come to the point, sir! You’ve got your hush money, and you’ll get no more!” thundered the major, bringing his fist on the table with a bang that made the candlesticks jump.

“I am content, though do me the justice to admit that had I made it ten thousand you would

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have paid it!" And Wakefield's black eyes twinkled wickedly. "But you have another son, Mrs. Ormerod?"

"Nay, sir! No one can lay charge of treason at Humphrey's door!"

"Granted, madam!" smiled the scoundrel, secretly gloating over the distress he was causing. "But it is of Mr. George Ormerod that I would speak. His case is different, and the price of my silence over his business is another thousand guineas!"

They both looked at him in speechless amazement, but he held up his hand and checked the words that were struggling to find utterance.

"Hold!" he laughed. "You are going to say that George is dead, but I can assure you he was very much alive the last time I saw him, and that is not six hours ago!"

"*And you will find him very much alive now, Ebenezer Cork!*" cried Mr. Nethersole, covering the speaker with a pistol as he stepped out of the fireplace.

"God bless my soul!" gasped Uncle Ormerod. "This is indeed the last straw, sir! And how does Mr. 'Neitherside' come to know

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his way into the Hall, unless he be this hound's confederate? ”

“ Nay, Uncle Egerton! ” laughed the newcomer, plucking off his red wig and flinging it upon the table. “ It was you yourself who showed me the secret passage when I was scarce higher than your own sword-belt! ”

“ George! ” screamed Mrs. Ormerod, starting up and collapsing into the arms of Humphrey, who darted out of the fireplace in time to catch her as she fell, and carried her from the room.

“ George! ” exclaimed the major, forgetting everything in the surprise of that discovery.

But Mr. Ned “ Neitherside ” continued to cover the writhing, livid figure in the chair with the long horse-pistol, his own shadow hiding Dick, who still knelt in the fireplace behind him.

“ So, Ebenezer Cork, I have you at last! Jacobite spy, turned informer for the Government, stooping to wring hush money out of a mother's heart! You have been very clever, but your very cunning has undone you to-night! ”

The man they had known as Wakefield threw a desperate glance at the door as Humphrey returned and locked it again, and the words of

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his judge seemed to cut the tense atmosphere of the panelled room like an avenging knife.

“ Turn your thoughts back, Ebenezer Cork, for that is your proper name, to those days when you were a lanky whelp on a stool in your wicked old father’s office in Bristol city. Have you forgotten how I shipped aboard the privateer you owned? How we sailed back after three years’ voyaging with a fortune under our hatches? And how you robbed me of my share, as you robbed the other gentlemen adventurers who had been my good shipmates? ”

“ You were paid, and amply paid,” said Cork, alias Wakefield, in a voice that rattled in his throat. “ Did I not count the money out myself? ”

“ Silence, dog! Yes, you did! But who caused our wine to be drugged that night and took from us every stiver, so that we awoke penniless, with heads on fire and pockets empty? Ha! How do I know these things? I will tell you. Your villainy drove me to the ‘ road ’—I had no other alternative—and on the ‘ road ’ one meets with strange companions. But enough of that. Not content with ruining one brother, you tamper with the loyalty of another, and, indeed,

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by so doing you have brought more things about than you could wot of.

“ Listen to me, Uncle Egerton. You dubbed me Ned ‘ Neitherside ’ at the muster, little knowing what it cost me not to draw for the King, but the prodigal had a mission even more sacred. He saw his twin brothers arrayed against one another, and he vowed to face men’s scorn that he might watch over both. Do you mind that night, Ebenezer Cork, when my uncle, Tom Leigh, gave you two thousand guineas to carry to the Pretender? Maybe you have guessed ere now that ’twas I who eased you of them in Newbridge Hollow yonder; but ’twill be news even to you that the Jacobite gold went to equip Daracotte’s Light Horse ! ”

“ Stap my vitals ! ” exclaimed Uncle Egerton, but his words were drowned in the sharp report of a pistol.

The spy had drawn his weapon, as he thought, unseen, and its muzzle had been creeping to the level of the table top, when George Ormerod saw it and fired first !

As the blue smoke curled away from the avenging barrel Dick stepped out of the darkness of the cavity, cast one glance at the dead villain

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under the table, and looked appealingly at his uncle.

“Eh, what?” stammered the old dragoon, all his sternness vanishing at sight of the wan face and the empty sleeve. “My boy, my boy, thank Heaven you are back amongst us!”

“Yes, Uncle Egerton, and we must thank George too. But where is my mother? He and I have so much to tell her.”

“It seems to me, mother, that the most astonishing part of the whole business was the moment we chose for our arrival,” said George, when they were able to speak calmly of that terrible night. “I had long suspected Wakefield, as he called himself, to be a traitor to the rebel cause, but I had lost sight of him. He was the last man in the world I thought to find here when good Doctor Cobbe told us we might safely bring Dick home again.”

“And to think he was lying all those months almost within sight of this house and you never told me!” exclaimed Mrs. Ormerod reproachfully.

“God bless my soul! And a very good job too! Do you think you could have kept away

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from Withy Lane? And then the village would have known everything! Look at your boys! Mary, you ought to be a happy woman!"

"I am, Egerton." And she pointed to the Colonel's portrait, which seemed to be smiling at them, the two swords once more hanging beneath it, crossed in peace now, and poor Dick's innocent of human blood!

And, more than that, another picture, long absent from its place, hung in the corner, and Ned "Neitherside" was looking at it.

"I really must have been quite a pretty boy in those days, mother," he laughed.

She flung an arm about him as he stooped over the settee, where she sat between the twins, Lucy, Margery and Ruth an admiring circle at their feet.

"Hum!" grunted Uncle Egerton, thrusting his head and shoulders through the open window behind them. "A very nice little family party! Here, Dick, you rascal, there's news for you. Your Pretender has escaped after all and landed in France!"

Dick started and smiled sadly at his empty sleeve.

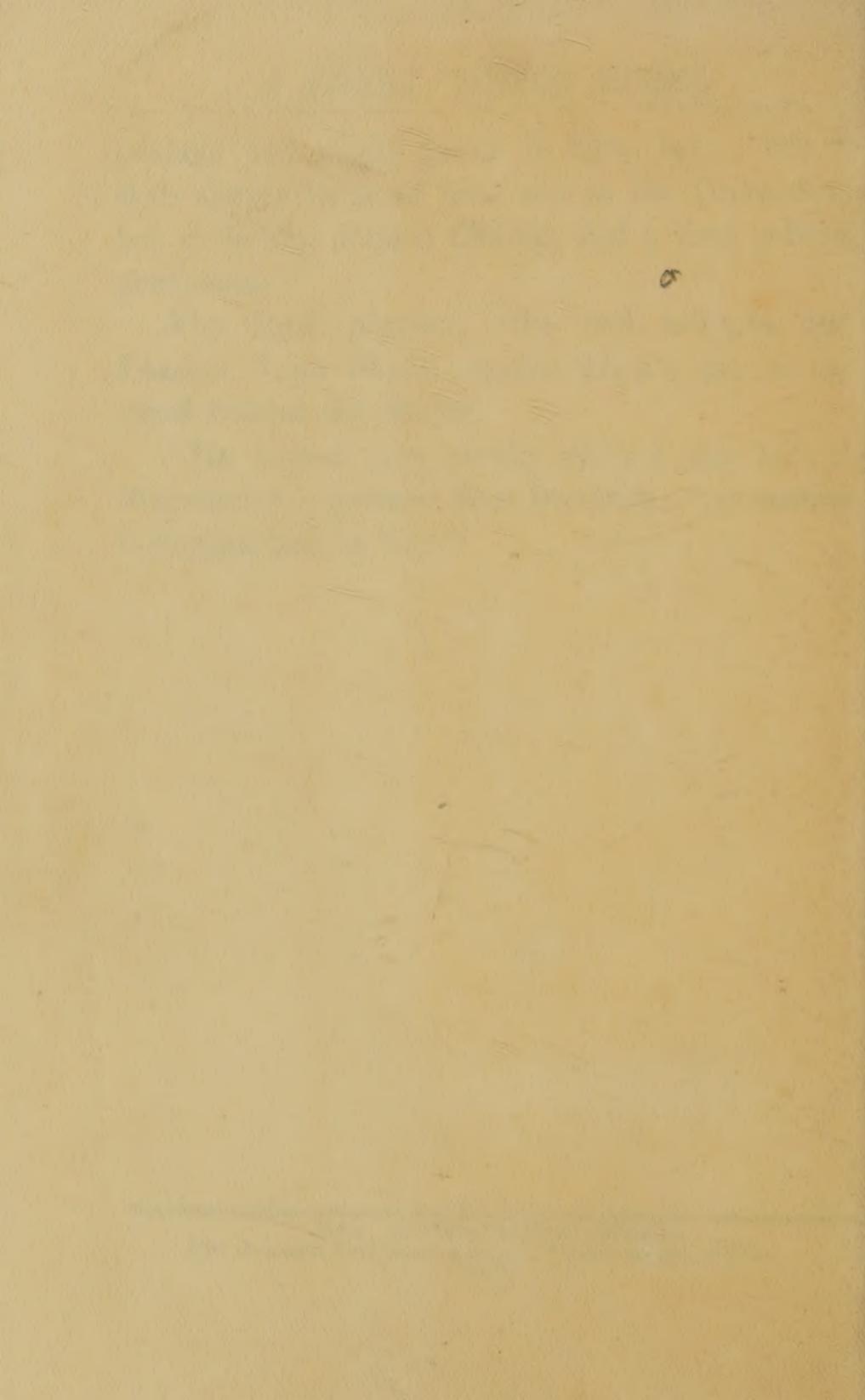
"I am glad," he said quietly. "'Twas all a

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mistake and ought never to have been; but I shall always think of him, not as the Pretender, but as Bonnie Prince Charlie, and a very gallant gentleman!"

The lame poacher, who had brought the *London News Sheet*, caught Dick's eye as he stood behind the Major.

"He looked very pretty when I saw him i' Manchester," grinned Sam Brewster; "so mebbe it happen best as 'tis!"



Alan
Mc Donald

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